

The Princess's Spirit Trilogy:

A Noughties Princess Spirit Story

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Contents

Angelle's New Era	5
The Royal College	12
The Princess Spirit Society	21
War Breaks Out	30
The Princess Spirit's First Test	39
Angelle's Big Decision	52
Purple and Yellow: A Force to be Reckoned With	64
The Debate	74
Election Day	86
The Board Room	99
The Interfaith Club Dilemma	107
What Makes Us Who We Are	118
The Road to Midterms	128
Change The Era	140
Coming of Age	152
The Heirs Council	162
A Change of Mood	171
The Re-Debate	181
Team Angelle Can Do It	190

The Music in this Book

The music included in Chapters 3, 6, 9, 11 and 19 of this book is available on the original TaraElla albums **LOVE IS ALL AROUND US** and **YOUR LOVE MAKES THE WORLD BEAUTIFUL**.

Visit **www.taraella.com** to get these tracks and other music from TaraElla.

For more Princess's Spirit Ideas

There are more fiction and non-fiction titles by TaraElla relating to the Princess's Spirit concept.

TaraElla also maintains a blog and (upcoming) show inspired by the Princess's Spirit, called The TaraElla Show.

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Chapter 1

Angelle's New Era

Angelle had just finished her breakfast. As she turned away from the table and started walking back to her room, she took a glance at the calendar. The thought that it was already the 16th of February 2003 suddenly hit her. It's been more than six weeks since her self promised new era had arrived. She needed to do more to prepare for this important year, the foundational year of the great new era.

2003 was going to be a big year for Angelle. It was the beginning of her 'development' as an aspiring Cultural Royal, one of the group of people elected to help shape Pacificland's future, and to many, one of the highest honours that a Pacificland citizen can have. This year, like most other aspiring cultural princes and

princesses of Pacificland turning 14, she would start at the Royal College of Pacificland, which she gained admission to last year, to the celebration of family and friends. Of course, going to Royal College was itself a great thing, and most graduates are set for life in terms of jobs and careers. But that was not Angelle's real goal, not that she had told anyone else about her grander plan. Many great lords and kings, (and maybe one day even a queen?), had their start at the Royal College, and then got elected as a Cultural Royal, something that Royal College students have a great advantage in, as per tradition.

Being someone historical. Contributing to the history of Pacificland, and hence potentially all humankind too. It's the dream of every idealist. It was certainly the dream of Angelle's mother, Anne, when she was young. She was not even a student at Royal College, and yet she became one of the few who were popularly elected to

the Heirs Council, a council for up-and-coming Cultural Royals, running on a friend's friend's ticket. Regrettably, she only ever made it that far. It wasn't easy to get further without the proper connections, the proper titles, the proper prestige. Her father was always much more practical. He was brought up with the knowledge that his heritage wasn't of sufficient prestige to carry him anywhere far, and so focussed his efforts on the economic improvement of his house. Regrettably, too, all that went up in smoke during the major stock market crash of 1997.

Angelle is determined to follow her mother's dreams, and this time she is determined to find success. 'The second generation makes it,' she has often told herself. Surely she still has plenty of disadvantages to overcome. A less than prestigious background and limited resources due to the family's partial financial ruin for one. But it's the 21st century, a time when

technology levels the playing field in everything, right? In her parents' time people had to cultivate vast information networks to be able to have a grasp on developments from every corner of the world. But thanks to a development called the internet, even well-informed commoners can now know more about the current world than some old lords. In a few years' time, when everyone moves to broadband internet, and the promise of 'Web 2.0' comes true, things will get even better. (Angelle didn't exactly know what 'Web 2.0' meant, but she was sure it was going to be important.)

Technology isn't only good for gathering information either. It could also become a great tool used to overcome hard limits imposed by conventional systems. Just a few days ago she read in the papers that a band of musicians banished by their patron two years ago nevertheless were still making quite a fortune

using technology. They recorded their music in a garage with the assistance of computers, and distributed their music to their already well developed fan base via the internet. Just a few more years ago, any band of musicians banished by their patrons would find themselves limited to playing for extremely small audiences, almost begging for a living. Many such bands would have to become boring ceremony bands, playing the same tired old stuff at every wedding they go to. With the right patrons musicians get to be known and popular around the world, playing to filled concert halls of thousands of people everywhere they go. Without a patron, life gets very difficult. But even here, things are changing.

Besides technology and the levelling playing field, there is something else in Angelle's favour too, she believes. Recent history has shown that she has a talent for bringing people together to work as a team. This mostly refers to the teams

of 'leftovers' she has often been able to assemble, and become leader of, for things such as school projects or local karaoke competitions. From the outside, Angelle often just looked like one of the smarter social outcasts or 'leftovers' who therefore had to do this work. But Angelle knew that if she actively begged she would have been allowed to join a team before being 'left over'. It's just that following another leader was not how she was designed to work. This year, she was going to start her new era by assembling her team, doing what she does best. But this time it was not going to be a 'leftover' team. She was going to actively reach out to build this dream team. A team that will help her overcome all sorts of disadvantages, and most importantly of all, the connection and prestige disadvantage.

She would need to get to work soon. The new era kicks off. Angelle isn't entirely sure whether she is really ready, but she has waited her entire

life for this. "Bring it on," she thought. "I'm ready."

Chapter 2

The Royal College

From the outside, the Royal College looked just like any ordinary, gray building, like all the other ones found in this part of town. But as Angelle stepped into its doors into the foyer, the place suddenly seemed much older, much more classical. For unlike the building itself, which had only about 50 years of history, the interiors were hundreds of years old. The bricks, the columns, and even the furniture, they were all disassembled from the previous Royal College building in Western Europe and shipped here to be reassembled. Beyond the foyer was the inner courtyard. It too looked classically European, for it was a replica of the front garden of the old Royal College.

Angelle felt awkward walking in a long robe, especially since it was in red, blue and gold, her family's house colours. Not to mention the warm weather today made things even worse. Her right arm is also getting tired from carrying the family sigil, a large flag of red, blue and gold again, hoisted on a golden flagstaff. It won't be like this every day though, because students are only required to wear their royal robes and carry their family sigils on Welcome Day and other special occasions. In front of her, Angelle could see a sea of colours, stretching as far as the eyes can see. The colours of every robe, representing the family colours of each house, was at least slight different, just like no two sigils were the same. Well, except for those who are siblings or cousins, of course.

Following the stream of people in front of her, Angelle stepped into the grand doors of the lobby. The lobby was a moderately small chamber, with two staircases on the left and

right leading upstairs, and another set of big, grand doors at the end, leading to the inner courtyard, which appeared to be deserted at the moment. Instead, everyone appeared to be streaming up the staircases. In front of the staircases, there was a sign pointing houses A-M to the left staircase, and houses N-Z to the right one, so Angelle knew clearly where she had to go.

Once on the upper floor, Angelle could see a long corridor with the sign 'Discussion Rooms', with many rooms on both sides. But this was not where the people were going today. Instead, they passed into a place called the 'Allies Living Quarters', which featured a comfortable lounge with sofas and a small kitchen, and two lifts leading to 'Floors 3-25'. But this wasn't their destination either. Angelle could now see that they were actually heading for the Great Hall, its grand entrance could now

be seen at the end of the lounge of the living quarters.

Once inside, Angelle could see that the Great Hall really does live up to its name. In fact, it looked like an even larger version of the Pacificland National Opera House, itself a replica of the Opera House in Paris. There was a sea of red chairs, with signs carrying the letters of the alphabet standing in front of every few rows. Angelle knew she had to find the letter J. Once there, she noticed that each chair had a person's name and a house name on it. After searching for some time, she found the one labelled 'Angelle, Easterner', and sat down. At the back of each seat she noticed a familiar slot. Thanks to her having watched Heirs Council meetings on television before, she knew this was the place to put the house sigil.

After what felt like forever, a tall, old man walked onto the stage. He was dressed in a robe that had five colours, red, yellow, green, blue and purple. Angelle immediately recognised these as the school colours of Royal College.

"Welcome students," he said.

"Welcome to the Royal College, for the new students. For the old ones, it's welcome back for another year. For those who still don't know me, I am Holland Northhome, Principle of this College. I know it may be boring for the old students, but for the benefit of the new students, I'm going to have to give the annual introductory talk again.

"Royal College is a very old tradition indeed. For the last 422 years, it has provided a great education to future royals around the world,

from the oldest campus back in Northern Europe, where the college was founded, to our second campus in Western Europe, and finally, in the last half a century, in this rather new campus.

"Young royals are the future of our society. As such, we have a duty to provide you with the best education, so that you can learn from our history, and have the capacity to think critically in facing the future, a future of uncertainties, a future where new challenges arise with every generation. For hundreds of years, our students have gone on to become important thinkers, leaders, and even in some cases, revolutionaries, the best example of which was during the movement to introduce a popular vote of the King, or a similar position, often called the President or Prime Minister, in many kingdoms.

"Back in Europe, the College used to provide education only for the allied kingdoms of Europe and North America. Today, the great tradition of alliances amongst these houses is still represented here, most notably in the Allies Living Quarters. However, after the humanity crisis of the Second World War, we could no longer continue this boundary of exclusion. Therefore, since the College moved here to Pacificland, we have also welcomed the guest houses, those from places as varied as the Asia and the vast continent of Africa. These houses are represented in the Guest Living Quarters, on the other side of this building.

"Now, it's time for another great tradition of the College. I will call upon each student, in alphabetical order according to the name of their House, to come up on stage and be officially enrolled as a student at the Royal College. Each student will also be given their timetables. Every enrolment will be

photographed by our professional photographer, and the photos will be given to you next week. Now let us begin. Miss Abigail of House Acadia!

Angelle felt a bit nervous, but was also a bit excited. After all, this was considered a rite of passage for all aspiring royals.

After what felt like an eternity, she finally heard her name being called. "Miss Angelle of Easterner!"

Angelle walked on stage, lifting her head up high, trying her best to smile and look confident. "If you can't even handle this, how can you achieve your dreams in life," she told herself.

Once on stage, the process was quite simple, surprisingly. All she had to do was to sign her name on a piece of paper, and receive her timetables from Principle Holland. It was all over within three minutes.

Chapter 3

The Princess Spirit Society

It is already 3am in the morning, but Angelle still cannot sleep. Tomorrow is Societies Day at the Royal College, and it is an opportunity to start building her future that she just cannot give up or mess up. On Societies Day, the two hundred or so clubs, or Societies, as they are officially known as, are invited to set up stalls in the Inner Courtyard and Outer Courtyard of the college to recruit new members, and will be provided material to do so free of charge. New Societies can also be registered on that day, and start collecting members immediately. In fact, half of the Inner Courtyard is reserved for new Societies each year. It really is a great opportunity to make friends, and look like a leader. Trouble is, Angelle still doesn't know what Society to start. The list of Societies she received yesterday looks like it has every

conceivable Society there already. What more could she add?

Angelle decided to get up and write a song. She found that sometimes that can help.

"Listen to My Heart

What they tell you is just so confusing

Sometimes you don't know what to do

And in this world there are so many crossroads

Which path should I go down

Sometimes I wonder why some cling onto

Walls that only make

Their own lives harder than how it should be

Let them go and we'll have freedom

I'll just listen to my heart

Live by doing what feels right

What really makes my life better

Should be the way to go

There are many stupid rules

But they don't do any good

Why should we be bothered with them

When we should know better

Time resolves all things

But at what cost

For me, will it be too late

Have you asked

I'll just listen to my heart

Live by doing what feels right

What really makes my life better

Should be the way to go"

As she reached below her pillow, Angelle noticed that a book was there. She remembered that it was 'The Princess Spirit', the book she was reading just before she went to bed, the book she would read before any important 'battle' in her life. When she was young, her mom gave her this book. Inside there were 20 lessons for young princesses, which she took to heart. When she becomes a Cultural Princess, she will lead by example, fulfilling the ideals in the book, she had promised herself since then. "Yes, this would be

her great idea. Tomorrow, she would go to Royal College to start the Princess Spirit Society," she thought. She could now sleep, knowing what to do finally.

As she walked into Royal College today, Angelle could see that people were already setting up stalls in the Outer Courtyard. As she stepped inside the College building, she could see a long line that had formed in front of the registration and supplies stall. She joined the line, and fifteen minutes later, she was allocated a stall in the Inner Courtyard, and a set of materials including a few cardboard pieces, crayons in ten different colours, and some blu-tack.

After she got to her stall, the first thing Angelle did was to use different coloured crayons to

write The Princess Spirit Society on the banner located at the top of the stall. A multicoloured title would surely gain more attention, she thought, not to mention that it looked pretty nice. Next, she wrote down the 20 lessons from the book onto the largest piece of cardboard, using every crayon exactly twice, cycling the colours. She then stuck this piece of cardboard on the stall, so everyone walking by could see it. Now that the stall was set up, she just had to wait.

After two hours, she had her first visitor.

"Hi, I'm Jenelle," the tall blonde said as she walked towards the stall. Angelle was excited to finally have a visitor.

"Hi, I'm Angelle, and we are setting up a new society today, the Princess Spirit Society," Angelle said.

"I'm going to have to stop you right there. Who's we? Where are the other people," Jenelle said.

"Well... they are busy... so I'm left to look after this stall, because I'm the president," Angelle said.

"Busy or non-existent? I actually guess non-existent, because I don't think anybody else wants to be a part of the rainbow crayon princess society," Jenelle said.

"It's not about rainbow crayons, you know, it's about a great idea. The Princess Spirit," Angelle said.

"Oh, The Princess Spirit. It sounds like I'm too old for that. And most people here would be too," Jenelle said, and started walking away.

"Don't you want to find out more?" Angelle screamed out.

Angelle almost cried. But she knew she had to carry on. It would look bad otherwise. "Those destined for greatness never give up on their dreams. Those who give up were simply never destined for greatness in the first place. Never give up despite the odds," she said to herself. So she pretended to smile, and after a while, was back to normal.

At the end of the day, the names of three other first years, 'Princess Natalie of House Eastpark', 'Princess Jenny of House Gold', and 'Prince Daniel of House Benring', were on the signup sheet. (They literally wrote their names this way.) This was still a start, Angelle thought. Not that Angelle knew a lot about these people yet. They came in a group, all three of them, and they just read the cardboard and put their names on the sheet, and walked away. The next

step was to connect with these people, and see if we can all be friends.

Chapter 4

War Breaks Out

Every day when classes ended for the midday break, the Princess Spirit club, i.e. Angelle, Natalie, Jenny and Daniel would walk together along the corridors and down the staircase, and through the doors outside to the inner courtyard, where they would sit in the warm sunshine and have their lunch. Today, however, the courtyard looked different. There were many people in there, mostly older students from the upper years, and they were holding up banners and chanting loudly. Angelle and her friends walked towards one of those people, and asked him what was going on.

"We are opposed to the War in Western Asia," he said. "You don't like wars, do you? You should sign our petition!"

"What war are you talking about?" Angelle asked.

"The government here in Pacificland will join an international war against a country in the western part of Asia. The war is aggression. We simply wish to tell the King we, the people, don't want the war. Signatures of young future royals like you will help us greatly," he said.

"But why does the King want us to go to war, if the people don't want it?" Angelle asked.

"The reasons are complex, it's all about who looks powerful, but it's just bad for humanity," he explained.

So the King is joining an international war to look powerful? The King of Pacificland needs to do this? Angelle was surprised. Angelle didn't like the idea of war anyway. Princesses shouldn't support wars, she believed. She thought of the Princess Spirit Book again. One rule was to help the less fortunate, and another

was to never wilfully harm others. War seems like something she can't support.

"And what's the reason for the war again, according to those who want it?" Angelle asked.

"I think they say it's about spreading liberty," Jenny said.

"Of course that's what they say. They always say that. But it's about making themselves look good. You know, to some people, a King who leads what looks like a just war, even if it's actually unjust, looks like a hero. It's good for their re-election," the young man explained.

"But bombing people to give them freedom? That doesn't make sense?" Natalie asked.

"Of course it doesn't make sense to you and me. But many people don't think that way. They see a King spreading justice around the world," the young man said.

"But why this country many miles away?" Angelle asked.

"But that's the point. People who are so 'foreign' that they are 'them' and not 'us'. Isn't it?" Natalie said.

"Your friend is very right. So are you going to sign our petition?" the young man asked Angelle again.

Angelle looked at the others, not really knowing what to do.

"My parents never sign anything like this, so I think we shouldn't," Jenny said.

"It's sometimes OK to sign petitions, but you don't want to be associated with certain organisations. It will ruin your future," Natalie offered.

Angelle really felt bad about just walking away now, but she shared similar concerns as her friends.

"Do you represent an organisation?" she asked the man.

"We are the Social Justice Group," he replied.

"And everyone else is part of that too?" she asked.

"Not really. There are many organisations out here today," he replied.

"Does anyone not represent any organisation here?" she asked.

"I think there are some. Most people here represent organisations. But it's OK, if you sign, it doesn't mean you join the organisation," he replied.

Angelle thought for a while.

"I'm sorry, but I think I'll sign a petition not associated with an organisation. They all go to the King anyway, right?" she said.

"I guess you can say that. Nice to meet you then," he said, and they parted.

Angelle and friends searched through the crowd and talked to lots of people, from lots of different organisations.

Finally they found someone who fit their criteria.

"We are not an organisation. We are Freedom Fighters. We fight for freedom," the young man explained. He gave them each a booklet. "Read this. It explains what freedom is, and why you should support freedom too."

"You really don't represent an organisation?" Natalie asked, still a bit sceptical.

"No, we don't. Indeed, our petition has the college letterhead on it, and it has no organisation name anywhere. It would break school rules to add the name of another organisation on documents with the college letterhead," he explained, and let them look at the petition book.

Angelle was satisfied. She decided to sign, and the others did too.

"We just did a good thing, I think," Angelle said.

"Me too, actually," Daniel said.

When she got home, Angelle had a lot to think about. Kings and governments were supposed to look after people, right? Do kings actually join wars just to make themselves look good, at great cost to humanity? Or is there some other story? Can wars actually spread liberty? But isn't that idea ridiculous?

Thinking deeper, if the King wants to wage a war, where does his authority to do so come

from? It's because the people trust him. Where does the money come from? The people again, in the form of taxes, of which her parents paid a lot every year. "I wouldn't want to help pay for a war I don't want and the rest of us don't want either. A real princess doesn't do that," Angelle thought. But thinking deeper again, there's no choice, really. Taxes have to be paid. But don't we pay taxes for running the country, not for wars miles away? This made Angelle question the virtue, or lack thereof, of the King and the government again. More importantly, she was also now questioning if we really lived in a free country, here in Pacifiland. So much for 'spreading liberty' if you don't even have enough at home.

Freedom. What is freedom? And why is it so important, why is this keeping her up at night, and why is this the justification of war? Can wars spread freedom again? She decided to

read the Freedom Fighter's booklet. Maybe it will give her some insight.

Chapter 5

The Princess Spirit's First Test

A few days ago, Angelle had spent a whole night reading The Freedom Fighter's Manifesto, the booklet she received a week earlier from a self-proclaimed Freedom Fighter. These few days she couldn't take her mind off what she had read. The booklet talked about many things that had not occurred to her before. The booklet talked about how freedom was good for individuals, families and communities, and was ultimately better than what any good king can provide for his subjects. This is in contradiction to Angelle's upbringing, where she was taught that nations thrive with good kings and fall when they have bad kings. The book also contained interesting quotes from 'freedom thinkers'. "So-called good kings often still do plenty of things detrimental to the welfare of people and families everywhere, like wage wars

on innocent people, so they can stay in power," was one quote that got Angelle thinking really hard. "Freedom is the ultimate protection against bad kings, because even with elections, bad kings can lie to get into power, and use tricky means to stay there forever," was another one.

One chapter of the book was particularly challenging for Angelle, however. It was the chapter on how kings around the world, including so-called good kings, actively oppressed gay and lesbian people and their families. "The so-called duty of good kings to uphold the so-called laws of nature is often really an excuse to impose a certain designed order on humankind, in a fashion often against what nature really is like," the book stated. The statement looked so logical to Angelle, but its implications regarding same-sex couples did not look so easy. "Same-sex couples should be allowed the freedom to marry as they wish, and

it will be not only consistent with freedom but be good for everyone, couples who will have much to contribute to a society where they are loved and respected," was how it was spelt out in the book. What Angelle had learnt, up until now, was that a duty of a good king was to uphold the laws of nature, and people partnering with others of the same-sex was not what nature intended, so good kings had to discourage it. Her family had taught her this, and her previous friends also thought likewise. To support same-sex marriages would also be to go against majority opinion, considering that a poll done last year found that less than 30% of Pacificland's citizens supported the government granting equality to same-sex couples. At least in Pacificland, in 2003, people like Angelle's family and friends are in the majority, clearly, and a good king should know to respect that, she was taught in the first week here at Royal College.

Angelle decided to raise the issue with Natalie.

"What's wrong with gay and lesbian people?"
Natalie replied, looking a bit disgusted.

Angelle thought she had gone too far, and decided to retreat a little. "It's just that the majority don't think gay marriages should be accepted. Good kings need to listen to the majority, right?" she offered.

"You really think that's true? That the majority should always rule?" Natalie said.

"It's what they taught us in week one," Angelle replied, a bit unsure now.

"The majority once thought that slavery was right too, you know. That's why we had slaves until less than 200 years ago. People were born or sold into slavery for life, and they lived a life of misery because the majority agreed with it. The majority can be unjust," Natalie said.

"So you support gay marriage?" Angelle asked.

"Of course. These people have difficult enough lives already, and anyone with half a heart wouldn't want to deny them even basic rights. I would be very sad if I couldn't marry the person I loved. How should they be any different?" Natalie replied.

Angelle thought for a while, and there was silence.

"Come have lunch with me today," Natalie said. "I'll introduce you to my sister."

Natalie was privately offended that Angelle didn't seem very comfortable with gay and lesbian people and same-sex marriages. For her, the struggle is personal. Her older sister, Ashley, is lesbian, and her family had been through a huge struggle with judgemental people everywhere for the past few years. Still, she understood that those who don't yet understand are the majority out there, and only conversation will improve things. "Angelle's not

a bad person," she told herself. "Like everyone else, she's been brainwashed, and she just needs to learn the truth."

The other thing Natalie was worried about was if Angelle's attitude towards gay people may cause difficulties for their friendship group. Daniel is sure to come out as gay in the future, she was certain.

Just a few weeks ago, the lunch hall was a grand sight. Hundreds of round, wooden tables and wooden chairs, in a long hall decorated with dozens of pictures showing the history of the College, really made an impression. But now that Angelle has gotten used to it, it just looked, 'normal'. When she arrived at the lunch hall today, she headed towards the usual corner where her friends would sit, not even thinking twice about how the place looked. But today, there was another reason to be excited. Angelle was excited to meet a more senior student for

lunch. Maybe she could learn more about Royal College, and how to survive it, she thought. As she approached, at one of the round, wooden tables, Natalie was already there, and seated beside her was a slightly older version of her. They do look very alike, Angelle thought.

"Hi Angelle," they both said, as she walked towards the table.

"Angelle, this is Ashley. Ashley, this is Angelle," said Natalie.

"Hi Natalie and Ashley," Angelle said.

"It's your first month here at Royal College?" Ashley asked.

"Yes," Angelle said.

"Are you liking it here?" Ashley asked.

"I think I am starting to like it more, especially with friends like Natalie," Angelle replied.

"You and Natalie, do you hang out together all the time?" Ashley asked.

"Well, almost," Angelle replied.

"We do almost everything together, we even signed an anti-war petition together," Natalie said.

"Last week?" Ashley asked.

"Yes. And it was Angelle's idea. She was also the one who started the Princess Spirit club, you know," Natalie said.

"So you're into the Princess Spirit too?" Ashley asked Angelle.

"You mean, as in the little purple book?" Angelle clarified.

"Of course. Where else?" Ashley replied.

Angelle was pleasantly surprised. She thought nobody else took the Princess Spirit thing seriously.

For the rest of the hour, Angelle and Ashley chatted about the Princess Spirit. Angelle was

happy to finally find somebody who can share it with her.

"You know why the Princess Spirit book was written?" Natalie suddenly asked.

"To teach young ladies to treat the world around them better?" Angelle said.

"Yes, that's one reason. But the author was actually hoping that the next generation of princesses and princes would really take the messages in the book to heart, and overcome the prejudices and hate that have been passed down the generations, prejudices and hate that have plagued even the greatest kings and queens alive," Ashley said, looking a bit sad.

"Anyway, it was nice talking to you, but I have to go now," Ashley said.

"It was surely nice talking to you. I hope we'll meet again," Angelle said.

After Ashley left, Natalie and Angelle started talking again. But a few minutes later, Natalie's face turned serious.

"Angelle, there's something I actually need to tell you," Natalie said.

"What," Angelle asked.

"Ashley actually left because she was sad, and she didn't want you to see it," Natalie said.

"Why?"

"She's actually in love with a girl, and has been upset that not everyone likes it. Her girlfriend has been talking about getting married in Canada, where the Prime Minister there has said he will soon allow same-sex marriages. But the families of some of her childhood friends won't allow them to attend," Natalie said.

Angelle fell silent. Ashley looked normal. She had always thought that one must be at least somewhat weird to be gay.

"But..."

"What?"

"But she looked so normal."

"Yes, gay and lesbian people are normal. Everything else is a myth," Natalie said.

Angelle began to cry. She didn't know why. She was confused.

When Angelle got home that evening, she locked herself in her own room, thinking about the day's events.

She took out her now torn copy of the 'purple book' and began reading it all over again. When

she was young, she would read it the way her mother had taught her to. Not that it was the wrong way, but she only applied it narrowly, to her own life and to 'everyday' circumstances. Now she could see that the Princess Spirit was more than that. It was not only a challenge to be a better person, but also a challenge to think different from the generations that have come before, and be better than them. To take care of the less fortunate sometimes means to challenge the majority and the established norms. And if everyone failed to do that, we would be failing in our duty to care, to fight for, and to love everyone. Society had failed people like Ashley, and the established norms and taboos, have kept even good people from seeing the truth. There isn't even enough freedom for people to really follow the way of the Princess Spirit, when it comes to things like standing up against the king and his 'advisers' on stupid wars that hurt people, and when it comes to helping people like Ashley to just have what everyone else takes for granted. No

wonder the Freedom Fighters say there is not nearly enough freedom of conscience in our present world.

Angelle is now a changed person. It will take a few more weeks to fully clarify her new ideas, but there is no going back. She is a new Princess, and she has a new fight.

Chapter 6

Angelle's Big Decision

The inner courtyard is a sea of colour today, as Angelle and her friends entered. There's excitement all around, as nominations for Heirs Council open today. Five people have announced that they will be running for Heirs Council so far, and four of them are students at this school. Heirs Council is one of two ways, and the easier way, to become a Cultural Royal. In this case, one has to be both a member of the council and have enough support from the other members to be elected a Cultural Royal. But this is still much easier than running for direct election as an adult citizen. Most people running for Heirs Council would also be expected to be students at Royal College, as the student body here holds half the votes, as per tradition. Red and yellow, deep blue, three shades of green and orange and purple are the

respective colours the four candidates have chosen, and flags and banners of these colours fill up the courtyard today.

Angelle is feeling dizzy because she didn't slept well these past few days, and the loud noises from Heirs Council candidates and their supporters in the inner courtyard today doesn't help either. But for Angelle, she has one big decision to make, and it is all anxiety and no excitement for her. Of course, nobody expects a first year like Angelle to nominate, and to do so without proper reason risks being seen as attention seeking. But as long as one can give a convincingly proper reason, it's also the perfect way to get a profile to prepare for future races, and those who end up with the biggest prizes tend to have big profiles starting early. In other words, it's a huge risk to take, and one that may bring great rewards. She had even talked this over with her mother, who encouraged her to go with her heart. To go with her heart...

"I've made my decision. I'm going to nominate this year," Angelle suddenly said aloud.

Her friends looked shocked.

"Are you alright," Jenny asked, a bit concerned.

"Yes, I am. I mean, I'm actually scared, but I think it's the right thing to do," Angelle said.

"If that's what you want, we're excited for you. But let's talk over it inside," Natalie said.

The conversation continued after they all sat down in the cafeteria.

"So you're really going to do this," Daniel asked, trying to look serious.

"OK. Listen. I know it's a big risk to take, for myself. But I can't just think about myself. Since that day I met your sister, and we had that conversation about the Princess Spirit, I've decided that I must take a stand for it. You know, I started to realise that the Princess Spirit is much bigger than what I thought it was all along, and it's something people should really think about. I need to share this with the world, sooner rather than later," Angelle said.

"So you're standing up for people like my sister now? Good on you!" Natalie said.

"People change, you know. I was misinformed, my apologies," Angelle said.

"But you're going to run on just one book, one idea?" Jenny asked. "Will people take it seriously?"

"Of course the Princess Spirit is just a starting point, and I will have a detailed platform, like

everyone else. We have a few months to get it together," Angelle said.

"I like your enthusiasm, Angelle, but Jenny probably has a point. You know, the Princess Spirit is seen by many as a kid's book, just like Cinderella and all those other fairytales of Princes and Princesses. Many people will not take it as seriously as platforms based in economic theories, religious values or even populism," Natalie said.

Angelle paused to think for a while.

"You're right. The Princess Spirit is just where we want to get to in the end. However, unlike in fairytales, it will not happen magically. I will offer practical solutions to help us get there. For example, I'm also inspired by that freedom stuff, you know, and they have a big platform. I think a lot of it will fit well with the Princess

Spirit. I mean, no wars, no discrimination or hate, letting people be themselves, it all fits. It's all about breaking through the things that trap us, as a society, things that prevent us from realising the Princess Spirit," Angelle said.

"Sounds great. If that's what you're going to do, know that we're behind you," Natalie said.

"Thanks. In fact, you are all welcome to join my team," Angelle said.

"What team?" Daniel asked.

"The Heirs Council team, of course. You run with me, and you may get a seat on the council. Once on the council, you will vote for me as Cultural Royalty in return. Have you heard about that?" Angelle said.

"Wow, that sounds exciting. I'm in," Daniel said.

"I'm in too. I'd like to be your adviser, if you don't mind," Natalie said.

"Sure. I need some advice, and what you've provided me with so far has been great," Angelle said.

"One thing though. You will need ten votes to be Cultural Royalty. You've only got three here," Natalie said.

"Well, once there, we can collect votes, persuade people, right? Especially with a smart adviser like you?" Angelle said.

"Fair point," Natalie said.

"How about you, Jenny," Daniel asked.

"I'll think about it," Jenny said. "I'm just a cautious person. But I'll be supporting you anyway."

They say that before you do something potentially life-changing, you should do a good luck ritual. That's what Angelle believes anyway, and one of her good luck rituals is to listen to this song she has loved for many years. Whenever she listens to it, it seems that everything will be just fine.

"Beauty

Sometimes it's just the rain

And sometimes it's just the sun

Whatever time we all need

Something to cheer us up

It may be just the night sky

Filled with little stars

But for us it can hold
More meaning than a book

We all need those little things
To remind us of what's worth living for
We all need those little things
Just to show us beauty
And in those beautiful things
We can see why life is worth living

It's just a little book
But to me it's the key
To a time when this world
Seemed like a paradise
And with it I can try to

Build the magic again

And for us love can last an eternity

And when I am under a

Dark cloud and the storm

I won't be afraid if

I have those dreams with me

And we'll keep on going

Till the great moments come back

And for me the world always

Is a world of hope

We all need those moments

Just to show us what life is all about

And then we can carry on in those darker
periods

So cherish those little beautiful things

And hold onto those great moments

And live the most out of what comes our way"

Angelle and her friends got into a taxi together after classes. Normally they would go home, but today they were all going to the same place, excitedly.

"You want to bring these people home with you today?" Angelle's driver for today asked.

"Not really. But can you please take us to the Registrations Office, on Kings Road?" asked Angelle.

"You know, my job is to take students home, not do this. But... if you're nominating, then that's... fine with me. So you're nominating? For real?" the driver asked.

"Yes sir," Angelle said.

"You would be the youngest person to nominate in more than a decade, you know?"

"I know, and I'm up for the challenge," Angelle said.

"Good on you. You already have my support. Now let's go," the driver said.

Chapter 7

Purple and Yellow: A Force to be Reckoned With

Angelle and her friends had been campaigning in the inner courtyard every day for a week now, trying to gather supporters. Purple and yellow, a combination of the colour of the cover of the Princess Spirit book and the traditional colour representing freedom fighters, has now joined the many other colour combinations being represented amongst the banners and flags colouring the courtyard. However, the purple and yellow team was still amongst the smallest, and was now being surpassed even by teams that have come on board later. Today, it seems that even the red and brown team, which had only been here for three days, has definitely got bigger than purple and yellow, with its seven members.

"Looks like my team is bigger than yours," Jenelle said, as she approached the a dozen or so people rallying around the purple and yellow banners.

"Really?" Angelle asked.

"Are you blind?" Jenelle said, pointing to the two dozen or so people now standing behind her. Jenelle had gained a 'cool girl' reputation in the past few weeks and the most superficial people are now following her around apparently. "We aren't even running for election and we are twice your size."

"So what? Why don't you run for election then?" Angelle said.

"We don't run for elections because it's only for people who want to waste their time, sitting through boring council meetings. But if we did, we would do a much better job of it than you people, clearly," Jenelle said.

"If you aren't running then you're irrelevant and can be ignored. Goodnight," Natalie said.

"Trying to be smart, right? If you were so smart you wouldn't be this loser's sidekick. But clearly you're just not smart enough, so you're over there instead of over here," Jenelle said.

"Your crew doesn't stand for anything except being selfish and stupid, why would she want to be over there?" Angelle said.

"Did you just call us stupid? Let's go and tell the student media," Jenelle said.

"Just ignore them," Natalie said to Angelle.

That Team Angelle is struggling is actually unsurprising, given that all the other teams are headed by more senior students, who have taken their time to build connections. It would

be unrealistic to expect purple and yellow to be the biggest team here, Angelle thought, but if she wanted to make a real impact, she would have to at least raise her profile a bit more.

"Imagine if only I could get on television. I could be like that guy in California who just got elected," Angelle said.

"Yes, that would be nice, wouldn't it," Natalie said.

"But only rich people with lots of connections can get on there, right," Jenny said.

"Yes, that's true. But that's the beauty of technology. The world is changing, and soon people are not going to need to get on TV to be that popular guy," Mandel, one of the newest members of Team Angelle, said.

"But how?" Angelle asked.

"You know, the internet. The blog thing is getting big these few years. You know, where you have a website you can post to regularly, and people will come back to read it again and again if they love it. It's kind of like having your own TV show. Only that it's text based, of course," Mandel said.

Angelle looked interested.

"I have one actually. I'll show you after classes today if you want," Daniel said.

Angelle and her friends gathered excitedly around a computer in the library. They could only have it for half an hour, since they did not have a prior booking, and even had to queue for half an hour just to get this computer. But it was more than enough time for what Daniel had to show them today. Especially since the internet

connection in the college library is supposedly fifty times faster than what most people have at home. It's called 'broadband internet', apparently.

Daniel's blog looked exciting. It had a background of blue, green and pink, his favourite colours, and even a photo of him that was professionally taken. It had entries posted every week or so, and it told the story of his life.

"Those colours are gay," Mandel said.

"We have decided that homophobia is not OK here," Natalie said.

"I'm not saying he's gay. I'm just saying that the colours don't look good," Mandel said.

"So you're using the word gay to mean bad. We don't do this here, you know," Natalie said.

"OK, let's not argue over this. I'm fine," Daniel said.

Meanwhile, Angelle was too absorbed, studying the blog, to notice the argument.

"As my advisor, would you think something like this would be helpful for me?" Angelle asked Natalie.

"It wouldn't hurt to try. What not do it?" Natalie said.

"I'll show you how to start one. And make it look way better than this one here," Mandel said.

And so they started the blog, Angelle and the Princess Spirit. Of course it had a purple and yellow background, and a photo of Angelle wearing those colours, taken in the inner courtyard a week ago, to commemorate the start of their campaign. Angelle decided that the first entry should explain her deep connection with the idea of the Princess Spirit,

and how she proposed to make it happen, via 'liberty and love', her new signature phrase.

Angelle has been very excited these few days. After monthly efforts of recruiting people to Team Angelle every campaign day in the inner courtyard, Team Angelle was still quite small. In the first month after nominations, when every day was campaign day in the inner courtyard, she had only limited success. Early days, she thought. However, it only became even harder after that month was over, and campaign days were held only once a month. Without the ongoing momentum, people became much less interested. Angelle's blog had also helped a bit too, though not as much as she had hoped, at least up until now. After more than one year of posting on her blog and promoting it in every way she can, she had only gathered a few

thousand readers, and of those, only a dozen or so offered to volunteer for Team Angelle. So with the elections only two months away, Team Angelle had only around fifty volunteers, and a few thousand pledged supporters. Compare that with the front running teams, with thousands of volunteers and millions of pledged supporters. Angelle wasn't going to compete with them, not this time around, but she knew she needed more to make at least an impact.

But now, everything was about to change. One of the editors of a quite well known website had read Angelle's blog, and liked it very much. He has decided to run a story on his website about Angelle, and her blog. Angelle gave him a 'virtual interview' a few days ago, which was nothing more than filling in a questionnaire sent via e-mail, and attaching a few professionally shot photos with the reply. The story went up today, and to Angelle's pleasant surprise, it had

brought in more readers than she ever did on her own.

"I've reached 12,537 readers today," she texted Natalie on her phone.

"Wow!" was the reply she got.

It was still too early to tell what kind of impact this late boost would have, on the level of support she would get going into the election. But still, this was VERY encouraging for Angelle and her team.

Chapter 8

The Debate

A few days have now passed since Angelle's blog became, well, widely known. In the internet vocabulary, one could say that it had gone 'viral', i.e. that it is spreading like a virus. More websites, including even more popular ones, had also featured the blog, and by extension Angelle herself, in these few days, and as a result, she has now had more than 300,000 readers. She was now a 'force to be reckoned with', according to some journalists.

Today, she also received an invitation to debate, from a fairly large, though not front-running team. It was quite the honour, she thought, as it generally meant you are now in the big league. The invitation was sent from a group called 'The Rules Guardians', for a debate to be run at the

Royal College after classes next Monday.
Angelle summoned her team for an 'emergency meeting' to discuss this.

"We definitely should accept this, right?"
Angelle asked.

"You'd be mad not too. Imagine all the media attention. Debates in the last few months always get media attention," Natalie said.

"I would have to agree," Mandel said.

"And for once, I can agree with him," Daniel said.

"So we're doing it. Does anyone know anything about The Rules Guardians?" Angelle asked.

There was silence.

"I don't think they are that famous. I know that the invitation states that they have over a million supporters, but for some surprising

reason, they are not famous. I for one haven't heard of them before," Natalie said.

"So shall we still do it?" Angelle asked.

"Of course. Just go for it anyway. It isn't as if it's a trap or that they are lying, if there's a debate it means that they have the numbers to book it, so the invitation isn't lying. It doesn't matter who they are, either. It only matters that you show the world who you are," Natalie said.

As Angelle was about to prepare for her debate, she realised that there was still one important thing she needed to do. Her family had not been aware of her platform yet, as they had given her some autonomy to figure out the best way to do things, as they put it. Some aspects of the platform may be, to put it mildly,

unexpected by her family, and when the debate goes public, it may cause some shock.

Angelle decided to show her mother a copy of the platform. She nervously waited as her mother read it carefully, from cover to cover.

"Well, you know that I don't agree with everything that's in there, but I know you've got to be flexible in the way you bring people together, so I'm going to respect whichever way you go," her mother said.

Angelle was relieved.

"So... can you brief our family on what I'm about to do, in case it's not what they expected?" she asked.

"Yes, I will. We all understand that this is an important start for your career, and you need to

bring as many people on board as possible right now."

So that was one more problem solved. One day, Angelle will need to tell her family about how recent events have changed her beliefs, from the bottom of her heart. But for right now, this will do.

The Grand Hall of Royal College was divided into three parts today, Angelle could see as she and her team walked in. The back part of the hall was designated the 'neutral zone', whilst the front part, including the stage, was evenly divided into two, purple and yellow on the left, white and dark blue on the right. Angelle had read about this kind of arrangement in books in the past, but seeing it herself was a whole new

experience. Being at the centre of such a debate was another new experience, and on a wholly different level too. Secretly, she felt a bit nervous.

Angelle and her team had been waiting nervously, on their seats in the purple and yellow side of the stage, for about an hour now. The neutral zone was now more than half filled with students waiting to watch the debate, and the purple and yellow side of the audience section had a few familiar faces, mostly friends of people involved in Team Angelle. But it appeared that not only were The Rules Guardians late, but the white and dark blue side of the audience section was also empty. Something looked suspicious, Angelle thought. Or maybe it was only her nerves.

Suddenly, a tall blonde figure dressed in white and dark blue entered from the side of the stage. It was Jenelle.

"So she's The Rules Guardians?" one surprised member of Team Angelle asked quietly. Angelle felt her heart sink.

Jenelle walked towards the microphone.

"Hi everybody, I am Jenelle Lacey, and I'm here to deliver a message on behalf of The Rules Guardians. The Rules Guardians have decided to pull out of this debate at the last minute, I'm sorry to say," she said.

There was an awkward silence in the room.

"The Rules Guardians are normally open to debating with other teams, teams that may share a different viewpoint on various matters.

However, as their name says, they are committed to certain values, namely the traditional values that help protect our families, societies and nations. And a last minute reading of the Princess Spirit Team's platform was found by senior team members to be incompatible with such values. Consistent with their rules of shunning people and organizations who are enemies of their cherished values, the president of The Rules Guardians has decided to pull out of the debate at the last minute, as he cannot in good conscience honour an organization whose values are clearly opposed to the good order of human society. That is all," she said, and walked off the stage.

There was heated discussion amongst the audience now. Angelle could vaguely hear that people were confused about what was actually happening, and the words 'lesbian' and 'gay marriage' were being uttered every now and then.

After school that day, Angelle and her team confronted Jenelle, as she was leaving.

"Are you behind the whole The Rules Guardians thing? You need to be honest," Natalie said.

"No, I'm not a member of any election team, as I've said before. Elections are not for cool people like us anyway. I was just helping them deliver a message," Jenelle said.

"So why did you do that?" Angelle asked.

"You know, The Rules Guardians is about to become the coolest team here, and cool people are attracted to each other," Jenelle said.

"But nobody even knows who The Rules Guardians is," Mandel said.

"Well, not after everyone and their parents gets one of these in their mail," Jenelle said, handing them each a pamphlet. "Goodbye guys."

Angelle read the pamphlet.

"The Rules Guardians is committed to the traditional values that help protect our families, societies and nations, the very values which are under threat from people who think they know better than centuries of history...

"Right now, around the world, our values are under attack. In the past four years, gay marriage has gone from being globally rejected to being legalised in two European countries, one US state and several Canadian provinces, and there will be more to come if we don't act soon enough. In fact, our very own King, here in Pacificland, is leaving his options open, refusing

to defend the time-honoured definition of marriage being between a man and a woman...

Angelle suddenly had a realisation. The pamphlet looked and read very much like one her parents recently received from Senator Jashor, who is running for election to be King of Pacificland against the incumbent King March. One of Jashor's favourite lines of attack against King March was that he had not instructed government departments not to recognise recent same-sex marriage certificates from Canada, instead allowing each department to act on their own conscience. Jashor often pledged to introduce laws to prohibit this from happening, based on similar laws already enacted and enforced by the American and Australian federal governments. Could The Rules Guardians be an extension of Jashor and his team? If so, they had big money behind them, and Team Angelle would be in big trouble.

Chapter 9

Election Day

14 November 2004. One day till election day. One more day of campaigning to do. Today, in the inner courtyard, every team will try their best to secure every last bit of support. Passions will clash. There will be no peace today.

"I have a philosophical question for you. Since you people don't even support tough action against those who threaten our way of life, do you actually stand for anything? Or are you just crazy pacifists who will let us all bow in front of evil, doing nothing about it?" Jenelle said.

"First of all..." Natalie began.

"Oops, I forgot you were all talk and no action. You know, in a war there's no time to talk, losers," Jenelle said and walked away.

"Honestly, I want this to be over now. It's not like we're going to win. You were just in it to raise some profile, right?" Mandel said.

Angelle felt frustrated. Giving up before it's over is poor form. But she couldn't blame Mandel, she thought. Not only were the polls looking increasingly bad for them, the past few days haven't felt too great in the inner courtyard either. Since the debate, just as Jenelle had said, The Rules Guardians began an intense campaign, and was now the frontrunner. Whilst The Rules Guardians did not even have any campus presence, their methods of labelling other teams as the enemy of traditional values and 'shunning' them (but really still talking ill about them all the time) has been picked up by similar-minded teams, wanting to ride on this wave of 'conservative awakening', as some commentators are now calling it. And what

better target to pick than the one already chosen by the team they want to emulate? Purple and yellow has been receiving abusive comment after abusive comment for a few weeks now.

And recently it only got worse, in a way similar to the domino effect. Last Wednesday afternoon was when it all went up to another level. It all started when the American president was re-elected, the very president who launched the war last year, who was resolutely opposed to same-sex marriages, and who won his re-election at least partially on the latter point. To add insult to injury for those who supported equality, many states also passed bans on same-sex marriages by popular vote, making their courts and politicians unable to act on the matter, making sure they don't join the equality bandwagon anytime soon. Here in Pacificland, Jashor quickly seized on these two 'victories' and also the victory of the Australian

Prime Minister one month earlier, who was also a strong supporter of the war and a strong opponent of same-sex marriage. "Clearly people want and need strong leaders who will defend their nations and their traditional values, in uncertain times like these. Since our King wouldn't defend our nation properly, we need someone else to do the job," Jashor stated in a television advertisement repeated again and again on television. When King March came out in support of marriage equality, it gave Jashor even more ammunition. "If a people as liberty loving as the Americans won't support it, you know it has nothing to do with liberty," he famously said. At that moment, it appeared King March's reign was over, and his last minute promise to introduce marriage equality was as worthless as bank notes printed by a failing government. Last Saturday's election was only a formality.

Ever since King Jashor's victory, those who believed in a 'strong man' running things have gained tremendous confidence, and defenders of peace, liberty, compassion and equality alike have shrunk in confidence in a very palpable way. This sentiment has clearly spread to the Heirs Council election too, and it looks like the next domino to fall to people like Jashor. Even worse, as often seen amongst high school students around the world, being a 'strong man' was now misinterpreted as being a bully by some candidates and their supporters here in Heirs College. And they didn't even have to be creative about their insults. In America, after the recent bitterly fought election, some who supported the winning side took to the internet to insult the losing side, people who supported peace, people who supported equality, by calling them things like 'weak' and 'loser' again and again, and worse terms. There were plenty of things local bullies could just copy from there.

"Never give up, right? It's part of the Princess Spirit, right?" Angelle said, almost half-heartedly.

"Yes, that's the most important thing," Natalie said.

"Given the situation out there now, should we actually, eh, mild down our platform, a bit, temporarily?" Jenny asked.

Angelle paused for some thought.

"I don't think so. Victories and defeats come and go, but being true to your beliefs and not leaving people behind are very much parts of the Princess Spirit. It would make our whole platform meaningless if we gave it up," she said.

17 November 2004. The inner courtyard was finally quiet now, after many weeks of drama.

After their recent defeat, Team Angelle was now much smaller. In fact, it's only the original four and Mandel here today. It's not surprising that this would happen, but it still hurt. It's sad that many people in this world only stay for victory parties, and will never help to pick up the pieces, Angelle thought.

"Why don't you dry your eyes with this box of weak idiots' tissues and get over it? It's designed just for people like you, after all," Jenelle said as she and her friends walked past Team Angelle, waving an empty tissue box that had been defaced with the word 'WEAK IDIOTS' on it.

"You clearly think we are important enough to you to have wasted time creating that box," Natalie said.

"We need to reboot. It's a long road, and honestly, Mandel was right. I was only running for profile this time anyway. Next time will be our serious test," Angelle said.

"You're only 15 so there are still many chances," Daniel said.

Angelle saw a boy and a girl, about the same height as each other, walking towards them. "Not more insults again," she thought.

As they came closer, Angelle could see that the boy was carrying a notebook computer. "He's a rich boy," she thought. Whilst notebook computers have not been uncommon for

several years now, it's usually owned by adults with serious business to do, and even here at Royal College, it's uncommon for students to have one.

"Hi, my name is Jordan, and this is my sister Katie," the boy said.

"We're twins, by the way," Katie said.

"We just want to say we voted for you guys, and we support you, and believe in what you do," Jordan said.

"What the world needs now is someone like you. A real Princess, who will never give up on her dreams. Don't give up on your beliefs, or your dream of winning those seats on the Council. Keep the good work up and don't ever change. The conservative wave is only temporary," Katie said.

"Don't you think it's here to stay? Many people think so," Jenny said.

"Not everyone, just those sheep who follow the crowd. Read this, by the way," Jordan said, opening up his computer.

"You have access to the internet here?" Daniel asked.

"The school actually provides free Wi-Fi access for those with computers. It's just that most of us don't and can't use it," Mandel said.

"So you don't have to line up like the rest of us to use the computers. Lucky you," Natalie said.

Angelle read the article.

"The so-called conservative awakening is only temporary, like the very conservative 1950s had to come before the 1960s changed everything. Right now, we just need to wait 10 years or so for this demographic change. The forces of change are awakening, whether it's for equality

or for liberty. It's just that the reactionary forces are still a bit stronger right now. But with more young people joining the voting population, things are about to change.....

Angelle wasn't sure if the article made sense, but it cheered her up a bit. At least it offered hope.

"By the way, you guys know that you still have a lot of support, right?" Katie said.

"We do? Let's be serious, right," Angelle said.

"No, I'm serious. Of course it wasn't enough to win you seats this time, but there's still a lot of people who voted for you and will still do so again. Someone even made a song for you," Katie said, as she proceeded to show Angelle.

"When The World Doesn't Know You're Special

You stood in the crowd today
Amongst so many faces, nobody could see you
You felt so small as if you don't exist
Even if you yelled nobody would hear
Days like these are never easy
We don't deserve to be forgotten

When The World Doesn't Know You are Special
Just remember, that I know
And remember, they can't take that away
When The World Doesn't Know You're Even
There
Just remember it's their loss
And remember, the doubters aren't worth your
time

Cause the World Goes Mad Sometimes
Though that doesn't change who you are
And whatever they tell you
It can't change the fact that you're special to
someone"

Chapter 10

The Board Room

It's another new year. It may be just another date on the calendar. But 2005 must represent an opportunity for renewal, Angelle told herself. The bitterness of the last few months of 2004 must now be put behind us, and we must begin a new chapter. "A defeat doesn't mean that one is not meant for greatness. The most important thing to do after a defeat is to get up, regroup, reflect, and try again," Angelle kept telling herself. "Never give up, despite the odds being against you - it's what a princess would do. If I am to run on a platform of the Princess Spirit, then I have to live it too." After all, every successful person who has ever lived must have also had their fair share of defeats, the difference was that they got up and try again. And what better time to reboot than during the start of a brand new year?

In every battle, one must clearly assess the battlefield, before deciding to make any move. So what is the battlefield like out there right now, at the start of 2005? The 'conservative awakening' may have swept through Pacificland, some overseas countries, and even the Heirs Council, but does that tell the whole story? Angelle decided that she must read about the situation out there. Whilst she had read a lot of news and mainstream opinion in the past two years in preparation for the election, there's a lot more out there to be discovered, she thought. What Jordan and Katie showed her in the past few weeks opened up a whole new world for her, and she was eager to find out more about what people really thought, outside the mainstream news reports. And maybe somewhere in there lies the answer as to what she had to do next.

It's been two weeks of reading everything she could get her hands on, Angelle began to notice a bigger reality, something she had never noticed or even thought about before. Forget those who said that The Rules Guardians will control Heirs Council for a generation to come, and forget those who said that Jashor will remain King for a decade or more. Who knows? After all, last week Angelle came across an article from 1997 saying that King March would be on the throne for a whole generation, and he only lasted for eight years in reality. People keep predicting the future on what we know right now, and keep predicting future trends on recent developments, but it's often not accurate. Whatever we have to live through right now may look very real and permanent, but in hindsight it may look very temporary, something that people made a big fuss of that was never worth the fuss. Perhaps that article,

the first one Jordan showed her, was right. Perhaps even next decade will be worlds apart from where we are now. Sometimes reading things from the past gives you perspective, just like this. We should thank the internet for letting us access things in the past so easily, even though it only stretches back ten years or so, Angelle thought. One day it will be even greater, when we can access things decades in the past. Maybe one day in the future people will read about the conservative awakening of 2004, and laugh about how it had vanished even before the decade ended.

And there's another thing. Through her reading, she also found a potential way back to victory, for herself, for her team, and for all those who believed in liberty, compassion, fairness and everything that The Rules Guardians and their kind didn't stand for. She decide to summon a meeting of Team Angelle, in the spare room of her home. It would be a regular thing from now

on. They would work on their goal until success came.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the Board Room. We will be meeting here regularly, after we get to decide on a timetable together. This is our Headquarters, the Headquarters of Team Princess Spirit.

You may be wondering why I have called this particular meeting so urgently. I am pleased to say that I have found a path to victory after all. It will include some reflection, some connecting with people, and some hard work, but it's something very possible. Unlike what some people are saying, I don't believe that The Rules Guardians will control the Council for a generation, or even half a generation. Who

knows, really? But we can set out to prove them wrong.

"Whilst the conservative awakening did claim a lot of victories last year, there is still a lot of strong discontent out there, discontent that can be the undoing of the conservative awakening soon enough. After all, victory is a winner-takes-all game, and the winners just need to do slightly better than the losers to 'take it all'. What an unfair system. But it also means that undoing any victory is easier than it looks, especially when one has momentum.

"Although, how can we have momentum, when everyone is looking so defeatist? When even those who were only decrying The Rules Guardians for its treatment of us at the debate several weeks ago are now saying that we all need to make peace with the same Values Team, because apparently now they are here to

stay and those uncompromisingly opposed to them would be crushed. What a cowardly thing to say! A real Princess, or Prince, will never bow down to bullies. Never!

"If we are to be winners, we can't be dragged down by all these losers. In other words, we have to stop listening to those cowards and start creating our own momentum. Here's my plan: we should connect with as many as possible of those groups of people disaffected by The Rules Guardians controlling council in particular, and also the so-called conservative awakening more generally. They include people as diverse as interfaith groups, gay rights champions, anti-war organisations, and even conservatives who just don't like this brand of conservatism, and many other types of people too. I want us all to do our research, and write down every such group we can find. Then we will decide when and how to connect with each group."

There was applause. That made Angelle confident again. At least optimism had returned to Team Angelle, even if there is pessimism everywhere else.

Chapter 11

The Interfaith Club Dilemma

Angelle was hating The Rules Guardians more and more every day. Her dislike of these people no longer had anything to do with the tactics they used on debate day or their rumoured connection with King Jashor's family which gave them great advantage in funding, it was all about what they believed now. A 'clash of ideals', as some would call it. According to her detailed research, The Rules Guardians was made up of people from various backgrounds, who had a common belief that morals were in decline because of 'weak leadership' from Kings and authority figures, that various 'social ills', including, in their view, the very existence of women who 'dare' to disobey their husbands and the very existence of same-sex relationships, were all caused by weak Kings and societies 'tolerating' these 'deviations'. Of

course, there was the unspoken belief that liberty should be restricted so that their vision of society can be imposed on all. Essentially a bunch of fascists, she thought. People should be able to cherish and live their own beliefs, and we should respect each other for our beliefs, Angelle thought, and people who want the King to impose particular worldviews on society were the worst kind. Not only that, but stupid, since one day the King of the day can turn on them too. She also found out that the wider conservative awakening here in Pacificland was actually comprised of a variety of people and groups, and although some were like The Rules Guardians, others simply had the misguided belief that what they were doing would solve the crisis of declining family values, as if gay people were to blame for the divorce rate when they couldn't even get married, and fighting wars overseas would help in any way, even though it destroyed families.

Sometimes, you need to create your own positivity to counteract all the hopelessness out there. Angelle likes to put her emotions into songs, and recently she had been writing quite a few songs, just to get her positivity running again. Today, she's written yet another one, one she particularly liked.

"Anthem of Idealists

I dream of a world

Where no one has to lose

I dream of a world

Where we can live together

And I will try my best to

Help this dream come true before my eyes

I dream of a world

Where there's no more poverty

I dream of a world

Where war is history

And I will try my best to

Help this dream come true before my eyes

I do believe that dreams do come true

That they can be achieved if we just work
towards them

I do believe that dreams do come true

That they can be achieved if we just work
towards them

If you will just join us and work toward our
dreams

One day the world will be a much better place

If you will just join us and work toward our
dreams

One day the world will be a much better place"

Angelle read the list of 156 groups of people that were supposedly in some way unhappy with The Rules Guardians and/or the conservative awakening movement, compiled from the research of Team Angelle collectively. One group stood out to her: the interfaith peace activists. Unlike any of the other 155 options, they provided the perfect key to smashing any resemblance of peace within The Values Group. Whilst the people in The Values Group had very similar goals for society, they came from various religious backgrounds, and due to their deep middle-ages style beliefs, mostly did not

tolerate each others' religious faiths. As long as this issue is not raised they remain a team, but if Team Angelle was able to form an alliance with the interfaith groups and make this an election issue, The Rules Guardians may explode even before they make it to election day. Intolerant people defeated by their own intolerance, how just would that be. This is an opportunity too good to miss.

But there was one compromise the group, in particular some members, had to be willing to make.

"Starting with the interfaith club at the College? Sounds like a good idea," Mandel said.

"Definitely worth a try," Natalie said.

"Um... there's a catch, unfortunately," Angelle said.

"What catch?" Jordan asked.

"Unfortunately, sometimes when we want success in the end, we need to play it skilfully in the middle," Angelle said.

"What do you mean, actually?" Katie asked.

"Let me put it this way: the people we are meeting are nice people, they are not like The Rules Guardians, but they are still religious people, and some may not like us as much if we talked about marriage equality, so we may need to keep that part of the platform away for the time being. I promise you we will stay true to that part of our platform, and we will fight for it in appropriate times. This is all just tactics," Angelle said.

There was a pause from everyone, as if to absorb the information they had just been given.

"Are you okay with it, everyone?" Angelle asked, particularly looking at Natalie.

There was another pause, as Natalie appeared to think and the others waited for her to speak.

"I'm fine with it. We all need to play it smart anyway, if we want to win anything in life. I can also speak for my sister, I know that she's also for playing it smart," she finally said.

The rest of the group nodded cautiously in agreement.

Angelle and Natalie had sat through a whole session of the interfaith club meeting just for an opportunity to introduce The Princess Spirit Team. "Two minutes only, at the end of the meeting," the club president had said when they asked him for the opportunity. Two

minutes was tough but doable. Afterwards they would leave a box for 'expressions of interest'. If they could get some people from here to join The Princess Spirit Team, it would be a great start, they thought. But as the meeting rolled on, it appeared to Angelle that this club may not have been what they were looking for after all. It was definitely an interfaith club, with Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, Pagans and Sikhs all represented. But it looked more like a friendship club where they discussed life at college, and where to hang out after school, rather than a club for the discussion of interfaith issues. Angelle decided that they should make the brief presentation they prepared anyway, at least it would be good practice, and if even one or two of them joined up it would still be a start towards rebuilding Team Angelle from the rump it had become since the defeat.

"Now, we have a special presentation from two girls who asked me for the opportunity to speak to you. Since we have a policy of welcoming any potential new members, I decided to grant their request. It's your time now, Angela and Natasha," President Jack said.

"It's Angelle and Natalie," Natalie said.

"Well, you may know me as a candidate who ran for election for the Heirs Council last year," Angelle began.

The group collectively shook their heads. It was discouraging, but Angelle forced a smile and continued.

"Anyway, we are Team Princess Spirit and we believe our platform aligns with the goal of promoting interfaith peace in the world, so we decided to, well, tell you about us," Angelle continued.

Some people appeared to look puzzled. Another bad sign.

"We support liberty of conscience, mutual respect, world peace, and tolerance and inclusion for all, something that we believe to align with both the general goal of interfaith peace and friendship, and also the core values of all the great religions of the world," Natalie said.

"So if you want to get to know us more, or perhaps sign up to be part of our team, you can put a note in this box to tell us who you are, what you think we can do for your cause, and how we can contact you. Thank you," Angelle said.

Chapter 12

What Makes Us Who We Are

"I didn't really understand what that had to do with interfaith club," read one message.

"It's cool. So deep, so deep," said the next one.

"Thanks but no thanks to your advertising," went the next one.

"What was that all about?" read the next one. As well as the one after that.

Despite being well received at the interfaith club, or at least Angelle believed so, none of them wanted to find out more about Team

Princess Spirit. But that's not the worst part. What's worse was that they just did not understand the point of Team Princess Spirit. None of them did, apparently. Angelle painfully tallied up the 'reasons for rejection' so that she could make a presentation to her team later.

"A princess never gives up," she was caught saying to herself.

"There's probably no other way to put it. I'm sorry, people," Angelle said at the end of the presentation. There was no point in denying the disaster, she thought.

"I'm sorry for having suggested the idea," Mandel said.

"Don't be sorry, all of you. Those people were lazy idiots who wouldn't think for themselves. We can do without them," Katie said.

"I wouldn't use those words," Angelle said, but she actually felt like agreeing with Katie. There's only so much anyone can take and still be kind, after all.

"Let's step back and take another look at the whole thing. It really ain't as bad as it looks," Natalie said.

"No words will change what it was," Angelle said. "I take full responsibility. We didn't explain it well."

"Learning from our lessons. That's what I meant. Interfaith club is but a small segment of our potential audience, and the most important thing is we learn our lessons and bounce back," Natalie said.

"So what is the lesson anyway? Just not to go to interfaith club again?" Jordan asked.

"Of course that's part of the lesson. Those people weren't going to be the most receptive in any sense, so we shouldn't waste any more time with them. But that's not all. As Angelle said, we need to improve our messaging next time," Natalie said.

"What do you mean by messaging? Like IM, which is short for instant messaging, on the internet?" Daniel asked.

"You really spend too much time using AIM. Trust me, nobody will use it in less than ten years. But the concept of messaging shall be forever important. It's about how you deliver your message to your audience. You see, I have become quite obsessed with observing international politics recently, and I have been studying last year's US election seriously," Natalie said.

"I don't think we are in a mood to revisit Bush's victory here," Katie said. "May I tell all of you that I don't like or support Bush."

"Me neither," Daniel said.

"Focus, people. Let's not talk about Bush," Natalie said.

"But weren't you the one who started this?" Jordan said.

"No, I wanted to talk about election messaging. There's been extensive analysis about what went right for Bush and what went wrong for Kerry, and there's something we can learn here. Basically, there is growing consensus that it all boiled down to the image and the message," Natalie said.

"But Kerry's a good guy and he had good policies, right," Jordan asked.

"That's right. But that wasn't enough. Image isn't just about being nice. And a bunch of policies just cannot be digested by the busy working people out there effectively, for them to understand us properly," Natalie explained.

"You mean the stupid rednecks out there, right? So what do you suggest, lowering ourselves to their level and talking in empty slogans?" Katie said.

"Well, if we are to reach out to people we ought not to think of them as stupid rednecks or things like that. And my characterisation of these people as busy, hardworking people who just do not have the time to look at policies in detail would likely be more accurate in any case. As for empty slogans, that's not our way. But putting our values into simple, memorable yet meaningful phrases, I'm all for that," Natalie said.

"But isn't that just a euphemism for slogans?" Katie asked.

"I think Natalie has a point. Our stuff wasn't digested well by the interfaith club, and we don't want that to happen again," Angelle said.

"And I just want to say again, we don't want empty slogans. We want meaningful ideas, that match up to our opponents, The Rules Guardians and their allies," Natalie said.

"Just what meaningful things do they offer?" Katie asked.

"It may not mean much to us, but it does mean something to some people," Natalie said.

"Like family values that are not inclusive of all families?" Katie offered.

"Unfortunately, it appeals to some people. I don't know, maybe those who are afraid of change, of embracing what I would call 'real family values'. But what we need to do is just to offer something even better. What can Team Princess Spirit and its values do for you and your

family? This should be the question we base our messages upon," Natalie said.

"By the way, I don't mean to interrupt, but I just received a text saying that Canada has just passed marriage equality. Three countries down, more than a hundred to go. We could have made four, if Jashor didn't get in," Daniel said.

"The world is changing, bit by bit. Which is good news. But to get us there quicker, we need to focus on working with the situation we've got. And I believe Natalie has some good ideas here," Angelle said.

Natalie had opened up a new presentation file on the computer, as Daniel and Angelle were talking.

"We should do some brainstorming here. So what do you think Team Princess Spirit can offer

for you and your family, if you were someone else out there?" Natalie asked.

"It's the way to a peaceful world," Mandel said.

Natalie typed 'world peace - now' into the computer.

"It will create happy families everywhere," Angelle said.

Natalie shortened this to 'happy families everywhere'.

"It can help people's dreams come true," Jordan offered.

This was shortened to 'making dreams come true'.

"Can this be perhaps linked to our major theme of freedom?" Angelle asked.

Natalie typed another phrase, 'the freedom to chase your dreams'.

"And not just dreaming of anything, but dreaming about a better world for all?" Katie offered.

This generated yet another phrase, 'the freedom to dream of a better world for all'.

"How about helping everyone be true to themselves," Daniel asked.

Natalie thought for a moment.

'A world without fakeness' was what she came up with in the end. Daniel looked satisfied.

And so more brainstorming went on.

Chapter 13

The Road to Midterms

Angelle still doesn't know how she should feel about the surprise announcement of this year's first ever midterm elections for Heirs Council, where just like in the US Congress, half of the Council's members would face re-election. On one hand, it's an opportunity. Any opportunity is a great opportunity. Plus, 2005 just passed by without major achievement, mainly because there was no clear goal to work towards, with the next elections thought to be not until late 2008. Sure, they had come out with plenty of short, meaningful messages since that meeting in June last year, but without an opportunity to test them, who knows if they were really useful for anything? A campaign would provide an opportunity to test everything, even if they don't end up winning anything. In fact, after the recent lack of success, Angelle was almost

certain 2006 wouldn't be her year. But this opportunity, just to test some new ideas, to get ready for 2008, would mean the world to Angelle.

On the other hand, this announcement was one not taken well by her friends. Everyone's thoughts was that King Jashor forced this extra election so he could clean out some of the seats currently held by the opposition, so that The Rules Guardians and their allies could control the Council. And if that happens, which opinion polls published today in the school newspaper say it could, who knows what the new Council could do? Plus just the fear of that happening and the hopelessness of being 'oppressed by Jashor', as some people are putting it, has certainly got a substantial part of Team Princess Spirit in a low mood. If that mood continued, Angelle really wouldn't be able to campaign effectively anyway.

"Looks like it's going to be a busy three months for all of us," Jenelle said as she walked by. Angelle had learned to ignore her by now.

"Or is it going to be for you? You know, you can always choose not to run, since we are winning every seat anyway, as today's polls say. Not running means not being a loser again, you know. I'm just trying to think for you," Jenelle said.

"Don't you have a campaign to run?" Katie asked.

"Of course, but I can spare a minute to talk to you losers as charity, since we're winning anyway," Jenelle said. "But I got to go now."

"I really hate her attitude," Katie said.

"She's been like this from day 1, so I've just learned to shut her out. It took three years, but I finally got there," Angelle said.

"And The Rules Guardians is really running a candidate like that?" Jordan asked.

"She's been with them for two years, so it's a loyalty reward kind of thing. Basically, she's popular and she's useful to them," Natalie explained. "It just shows how The Rules Guardians aren't really about values whatsoever."

"Why?" Mandel asked.

"You see, she wasn't part of The Rules Guardians until late in 2004, when they looked like winning the last election," Angelle explained.

"And from what I have heard, she actually made jokes about their 'values' earlier that year," Katie said. "What a hypocrite, joining a team you don't really believe in."

Angelle thought she could shut out Jenelle, but this morning's exchange just strengthened her resolve to run again. Angelle decided she needed to do something special for this campaign season, as it's the only way out of such an impossible situation. And she needed to introduce the special idea soon, or else the team will never even be in a mood to start campaigning. She needed the team to start believing, today.

"I need some advice from my adviser, and the rest of the team cannot hear that I am asking," Angelle said as she and Natalie were walking to class together.

"You're always welcome," Natalie said.

"I need one big, special idea. Something that, even if it will not realistically win us any seats, will make the team believe that we have a chance. And I will need to launch it soon, before they become any more depressed," Angelle said.

"Good thinking. I knew you weren't one to give up," Natalie said. "And I agree with your strategy."

"I think it would have to be something that looks new, big and promising, and hasn't been tried before," Angelle said.

"I think you are on the correct path again. How about using social media to promote your campaign? You can launch it at any time, even today," Natalie said.

"What are you talking about?" Angelle asked.

"You know, MySpace, things like that," Natalie said.

"I don't use MySpace. Besides, how can that help me?" Angelle asked. Angelle's impression was that MySpace was for people with nothing better to do than to spend hours to decorate their profiles with 'glitter' that only existed in pixels.

"I'll show you this afternoon," Natalie said.

Angelle remained sceptical, but at this point she would try anything.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, today I am announcing the launch of my campaign, the campaign of Team Princess Spirit, for the 2006 elections!" Angelle said in front of the 67 people who had bothered to turn up, as she unveiled what turned out, surprisingly, to be a computer.

"I don't mean to interrupt, but shouldn't we not fight an unwinnable election," Mandel said.

"Unwinnable? Whose to judge that? We won't know until later in the year, either way. But a Princess never gives up, not when she's got other people's lives riding on her success. And there are many lives that will change for the better if we prevail," Angelle said, trying to look confident.

"But what's the computer doing here?" Jordan asked.

"Well, it's our secret weapon," Angelle said as she connected it to the projector, which lighted up showing the MySpace homepage.

There were murmurs in the audience.

"MySpace as the secret weapon?" one was overheard saying, in disbelief.

"The world is changing. And so are election campaigns. Promotion via social media will soon become a vital part of any campaign, and some people have predicted that by 2008 every candidate will be using it. But if we can get in early, and use it in 2006, it will give us an edge," Angelle said, as she did a few clicks and the screen now displayed the MySpace profile of someone running for political office in the US.

There was careful applause.

"Overseas, some candidates are already using MySpace and other similar platforms to get their word out," Angelle explained. "But this is, in our opinion, not a very well set-up profile from a campaign point of view. Yes, he has a MySpace profile, but all it has are his name and photo, a brief bio and some contact details. He doesn't have our other secret weapon,

something we spent so much time developing in the past year."

Angelle did a few more clicks, and the Team Princess Spirit profile came up. It wasn't on MySpace, but rather it was on the Royal College Network, the new social network the school's new technology orientated chancellor had set up for every student. Predictably, it had a purple and yellow background, and a photo of Angelle on it. But it also had lots of short messages on it. 'World Peace - Now', 'Happy families everywhere', 'Making dreams come true', 'The freedom to dream of a better world for all', and 'A world without fakeness' were just some of them. Angelle clicked on 'Happy families everywhere', and it linked back to the Team Princess Spirit blog with a list of blog posts about marriage equality, the importance of looking after disadvantaged communities, and the like.

"Social media provides a platform to send messages out to the world. But the messages have to be easy to receive, and really mean something to the people receiving them. And in the past year, my team has been working on messages that are easy to digest and speak to dreaming minds and loving hearts around the world. This is our secret weapon. The Rules Guardians can offer only empty slogans based on fear of change, but our messages are all about love and a better world, the very things the Princess Spirit is about," Angelle said.

This time, there was real, loud applause. It appeared that Angelle had made a convincing case. She felt a bit relieved.

"We deliberately chose to set up our profile on Royal College Network, because from this year

every student has to use it to check their mail. So all of you should be familiar with it. If you are a true Team Princess Spirit supporter, you should send us a friend request, and we will approve it right away. You can also help by sharing our profile with your friends, for example by featuring it on your own profile. Every bit will help," Angelle said.

Chapter 14

Change The Era

The Team Princess Profile has been live for two weeks, as of today, and has been receiving a steady stream of audience. It has also already made 129 friends, not many, but a good start, considering that campaign season hadn't even begun yet. And it appears that The Rules Guardians still haven't set up a functioning profile in response. Rumours are that they just couldn't get one running, mainly because the page is maintained by the parents of the candidates, many of whom are very new to social media. It would also appear to confirm long standing whispers that The Rules Guardians is full of lazy and talentless people who are propped up by their parents, who are doing it for both ideological reasons and to help their undeserving children get great starts to their careers. Just these thoughts alone have

given Team Princess Spirit a popularity boost in recent days. After all, everyone loves to support an underdog facing an unfair playing field, but still managing to outshine its opponent every now and then.

But Team Princess Spirit does have one social media competitor. It's a new party called Change The Era, who are also running for election this year. Their profile went live three days after Angelle's, and it had the same format to it, so Angelle was certain they were watching her moves. Yesterday, they sent her a message, asking to meet in person, for a possible alliance, whatever that could mean. Angelle decided to take just Natalie along, not knowing whether they were really wanting to be friendly or not.

Angelle and Natalie had never been in this part of the College before. After all, this was the dormitory area, and as all the core Team Angelle members lived locally, they just never had to come here for anything. But today, Change The Era wanted to meet in Room 552, somebody's dormitory room.

Natalie knocked softly on the door, marked 552.

A young man, tall and thin, with shoulder length brown hair, came to answer it.

"Hi, I am Nick," he said as they got inside. "This is Change The Era HQ, AKA dorm room 552, AKA where I sleep."

"Is this meeting just with you, or is there anyone else?" Angelle asked, slightly uncomfortable,

almost reaching into her bag to make sure her personal alarm was still there.

"It will be just me representing CTE today, but that should be good enough, because I am the President," Nick said.

"So what are we here for, actually," Natalie asked.

"To discuss a possible alliance at the election, of course," Nick said.

"And why would we want that?" Angelle asked.

"CTE and your team are both up and coming parties, facing an unjust system, with a common enemy, The Rules Guardians," Nick said.

"But so are most of the other parties and candidates running for election this time around," Angelle said.

"What I think we need to find out is, what does CTE stand for, what is it about," Natalie said.

"Good question," Nick said. "We are for radical change. We are against the culture and system that has favoured parties like The Rules Guardians, and Kings like Jashor. We don't just ask for a seat at the table, you see. We want to Change The Era, change this College, this country, and even the world, into a new era. We want to change the conversation, so that a new world can be born."

"That's not very specific. What do you specifically propose to do?" Natalie asked.

"You see the 'values' that The Rules Guardians talk about again and again? Nobody out there is even questioning if they are good or bad. We will question every single one of them, and I personally stand against almost all of that rubbish," Nick said.

"You mean, as in opposing gay marriages, for example?" Natalie asked. "Surely a lot of people

are questioning that approach, even if it's still a minority here in 2006."

"I see you didn't get my point. I don't care about marriages as I don't care about family values. Now that's something you don't hear much out there, right? People don't question if the family is good, for example," Nick said.

"Well, some families are unfortunately dysfunctional, but most families are there to support people when they need it, and for most people it would be ungrateful to spit on their family, so to say, right?" Angelle said.

She then realised she may have gone a bit too far.

"I'm sorry if your own experience of family wasn't good, but what I was just trying to say was that it isn't the case for most of us," she said. "Just trying to answer your question there."

"You still don't get my point. There's nothing wrong with my family. It's just that we don't believe the family should be the fundamental unit of society," Nick said.

"Well, unfortunately, this is not what we believe at Team Princess Spirit," Natalie said.

"Let's not talk about that anymore. Is there anything else CTE stands for?" Angelle asked.

"As I said, basically we question everything. We also question freedom, what it is, if it's good," Nick said.

"Well, I think you and I can agree that both King Jashor and The Rules Guardians don't offer too much freedom," Natalie said. "Liberty is a core principle of Team Princess Spirit. Freedom enables the Princess Spirit to flourish. It allows people to truly embrace who they are, chase their dreams, and help build their vision of the world. Without freedom, in a society where

everything is decided by someone else above you, none of that can happen."

"You really believe in all of that?" Nick said, almost sarcastically.

Angelle had a bad feeling about this.

"What else should we believe in instead?" she said, almost defensively.

"You know why there's still so much sexism out there?" Nick said.

"Well, the world used to be much more sexist, and it doesn't change overnight. Team Princess Spirit will also attempt to change this. It wouldn't be easy, it will take some time, but I'm confident we can get there," Natalie said.

"How will you get there? By giving people more 'freedom'? If so, you are actually part of the problem. You see, as long as people have too much freedom to choose, bigots also have too much freedom to choose, to skirt around any anti-discrimination laws we have," Nick said.

"But in a society without freedom, we would both be in the kitchen all day rather than here as students," Angelle said. "That's the beauty of freedom."

"But freedom can only get you so far. We need to take control of the levers of power in society to end the injustice once and for all," Nick said.

"I admire your commitment to justice, but I think that's dangerous. Imagine if you were King, and you reformed society the way you wanted. And then another King came along, and used the same powers to reverse everything back to the 1950s," Natalie said.

"Whereas in a free society, progress may take some time, but it's not easily reversed. There's no way a free society would take away our equal education rights anymore, for example, at least here in Pacificland," Angelle said.

"It looks like we can't agree on that either. Not today at least. So is there anything else you want to talk about?" Natalie asked.

"Well, let's get to the practical bit. Our proposed alliance," Nick said.

"Why would we still have an alliance, when we can't agree on basic issues? I don't think we will have an alliance, sorry to say," Natalie said.

"But practically it's good, and it's necessary, for the both of us," Nick said.

"We have principles, and we stand for them," Natalie said.

"I don't think I can personally agree to an alliance at this point either, but we are a team, and I will tell my team what happened here today, the reasons you are proposing an alliance, and let them vote on it," Angelle said.

In the end, the vote wasn't even close. It came out at 119-2. Angelle breathed a sigh of relief.

"Now that it's all done, can I ask you something?" Natalie said.

"Go ahead," Angelle said.

"I wonder why you let them vote at all. It would really hurt us electorally in the longer term, and I know it would also hurt your values personally, to have this alliance. I wouldn't have let them vote," Natalie said.

"Well, the results speak for themselves, right?" Angelle said.

"But people aren't always rational. It could have gone the other way," Natalie said.

"I believed in my team. And it appears that I was right to do so. But the other reason was that I can't decide everything myself. If I made a

decision and it was disadvantageous in the short term, the team would lose confidence in me and it will fall apart. But if I let everyone have a say, then we are in this together, no matter how it turns out," Angelle said.

Chapter 15

Coming of Age

Things are always easier the second time round. At least, they look more familiar, and hence look easier. Now that campaigning season in the Inner Courtyard is now a familiar sight to Angelle and her team, it doesn't seem as daunting as the first time. The fact that this campaign season would be extra short, just several weeks, also make it look easier, although Angelle and her team knew that King Jashor deliberately decided to do this because it would favour The Rules Guardians and their allies.

Team Purple and Yellow also looked quite a bit larger, stronger and more well organised than last time. They had their messages, simple sentences of several words each that spoke

directly to the heart, displayed prominently on their banners, which attracted plenty of interest. And although they were still much smaller than The Rules Guardians, this time Team Princess Spirit was in fact one of the largest teams here. This was partly because Angelle was now more well known and had more followers, as a fourth year student, and partly because they started recruiting early, via social media. Of course, going forward this advantage would be reduced, now that The Rules Guardians as well as almost every other party now had a social media presence.

There was also another reason why Team Princess Spirit is relatively larger this time, a reason Angelle really doesn't like.

"It looks like we may enter the top 4 in terms of size by the end of the week," Mandel said,

observing the different banners in the Courtyard.

Angelle was watching too, and she was counting how many teams were left. There were only 13, including the very small teams probably on the verge of dropping out, and two teams that were just puppets of The Rules Guardians.

"Yes, unfortunately," Angelle said.

"Why unfortunately? Shouldn't you be happy?" Katie asked.

"I'm just angry that people aren't running just because they think Jashor will get his way anyway," Angelle replied.

"But you should be happy, because that means you really do have a chance this time. In a few weeks time, The Rules Guardians and their two allies, this team, and Change The Era will be the only major players left. Anyone who hates The Rules Guardians but are uncomfortable with the

radicalism of Change The Era will vote for us," Jordan said.

"Yes, I know I should be happy. It's just that I also feel angry, angry at people who give up all too easily," Angelle said.

This birthday is unlike any other. Not only was it special because Angelle was turning 18, which meant lots of speeches, but today there were more than 200 people here, which meant that there were a lot of people to speak to. Angelle had invited all of Team Princess Spirit along with everyone in her big family, after all, so she should have expected this. But it still seems surreal to her. She remembered that ten years ago she was scared that her 18th would be the smallest anyone had ever seen, because she was the unpopular kid back then. Eight-year-old

her would have been overjoyed if she knew what was to happen.

"It's time, my dear," her mom said.

It was time to give her 18th speech. In front of 250 plus people, no less. Not that she is scared about speaking in front of crowds anymore. But this would be such a special occasion for her personally, that she felt a bit nervous.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, and Princess Spirit people,

May I start by saying how grateful I am that all of you are attending my party. When I was little I always thought that my 18th would be a very private occasion, because I was simply unpopular back then. So you know how happy I am that all of you are here.

I am only here, doing what I am doing today, thanks to people like you. Like my mom, who taught me the importance of aiming high, of staying true to your dreams. Or like my dad, who taught me the value of hard work, of not giving up. Or like Team Princess Spirit, who believed in me, and stuck with me even when times were not so great. I cannot pretend to know what will happen at the ballot box next month, but whatever happens to me there, I know everything will have been worth it, because you believed in me.

In the years ahead, I want to do you all proud. You deserve something back from me after all, having invested so much in me. I can't guarantee that I will bring success every time, but I will try my best. I will never give up, because a Princess never gives up. And I will never change the person I am, the things I stand

for, no matter which way the wind out there blows.

Thank you."

Angelle and Natalie were reading the latest opinion polls on the school newspaper, the last polls before the elections tomorrow. It had both good and bad news. The good news was that Team Princess Spirit was likely to win one seat. A few months ago that would have been beyond Angelle's wildest dreams. It appeared that, as Jordan had predicted several weeks ago, when the smaller teams packed up and left, more and more votes came to Team Princess Spirit. Being one of the last teams not to give up came with its rewards. But the bad news was that it was only going to be one seat,

meaning that whilst Angelle would likely make it to the Council, none of her friends would. The accompanying editorial also pointed out that had Team Princess Spirit and Change The Era formed an alliance, there would have been more votes for both parties, likely winning an extra seat for both.

"If you made it to the Council and we didn't, we would still be happy for you no matter what, remember," Natalie said.

"Really?" Angelle said, not knowing what else to say.

"Of course. We've always been behind you. We've always believed in you. And in just two years' time, we'll get another chance, and it will be because of you," Natalie said.

"I have to confess, I actually think we made it this far because of you," Angelle said. "You've got all the great ideas."

"But they would mean nothing without a leader like you. I could never have been as brave and bold as you. Nominating in first year? Speaking in front of hundreds of people? That's not me. That's not just anyone. But that's you. You're special, you know," Natalie said.

"Looks like now only one of you will make it. Isn't it a shame that you rejected the alliance?" Nick said.

Angelle and Natalie looked up and found Nick standing right in front of them.

"What are you doing here? Isn't your zone over there?" Angelle said.

"I'm just coming to say hi. And also to remind you that your rejection of our deal meant that we would both have one less seat, and they will be going to The Rules Guardians instead. You need to be smarter next time," Nick said.

"The alliance will never happen, sorry," Natalie said.

"From my memory, you were first to advise your leader to reject us. It looks like you, number two on the ticket, will be the one with the most to lose. I know you regret it," Nick said.

"I actually have no regrets whatsoever. Doing the right thing by what we believe in is the most important. Forming alliances on incompatible platforms is not something I will endorse," Natalie said.

Chapter 16

The Heirs Council

One of the perks of being a Member of Heirs Council is that you are driven to your meetings in a state car, which usually happen after school, once a month or so. Today was the first time Angelle was one of those being picked up to go to the meeting. She was now part of the elite at Royal College, one of only fifty of so MHCs in the whole school, who got to have this special treatment. This was her moment. There were only two things she wished could be different. She really did not enjoy the fact that her friends couldn't be here with her. But they would soon be coming too - just two more years, she thought. Another thing she didn't like was that Jenelle got to the pickup point earlier than she did and was able to make fun of her as the 'late MHC'. But that really didn't matter too

much. Now that she was an MHC, she shouldn't have time thinking about silly things like that.

The meeting was on the outskirts of the city, so Angelle had a long ride. After what seemed like forever, Angelle suddenly noticed that the car was now underground. She had missed how it got there, but it appeared that she was in a tunnel. Then it suddenly came to a stop, in front of a giant door made of two huge metal panels.

"Agent ID and fingerprint please," announced a robotic voice.

Angelle's driver waved his ID in front of a card reader, and then proceeded to imprint his thumb on the attached fingerprint reader.

"Permission granted," the robotic voice announced.

The metal doors slid open, and revealed what appeared to be a giant lift. The car drove into the lift, and Angelle could feel it being lifted up gradually. And then it stopped. Before she knew it, the car door was being opened up.

"Welcome, Angelle of the House of Easterner, of Pacificland," a woman's voice said.

Angelle turned her head and found that a tall blond woman had opened the car door and was gesturing for her to follow. Angelle actually felt a bit nervous, this being her first time in such an unfamiliar environment, alone. It certainly didn't help that her family was half a world away now, either.

Angelle now noticed that they were now walking on a long red carpet, and that the blond woman was carrying the sigil of the House of Easterner, red and blue with a golden heart in the middle. She must have been assigned to assist me, Angelle thought.

"Where are we going?" Angelle decided to ask.

"To the Great Hall, of course. Where the meeting is going to start shortly. Hurry up or we'll be late," she said.

After almost an eternity of walking, Angelle now found herself in a room full of seats, facing a single podium. The blond woman guided her towards one of the seats in the front row, apparently already assigned to her.

"Do I have to sit here?" Angelle asked.

"It's been assigned. You are a new member, and therefore you have been assigned in the front row," the blond woman said, before turning away and leaving. She left the Easterner sigil attached to a slot at the back of Angelle's seat.

All around her, people were settling into seats. Some were already chatting away with their neighbours, and it appeared that some people actually knew each other quite well. Angelle suddenly felt quite alone, as she knew nobody here.

A young man walked across the podium, to where there was a microphone stand. The house fell quiet.

"Good morning ladies and gentlemen," he began.

"I am Prince Andrew of the House of Mantan. And now, may I introduce, Prince Jason of the House of Wetlands, the Head of the Heirs Council," Andrew said. Jason appeared from a door behind the podium, and Andrew left via that door. The house erupted into applause. Jason is well-liked in the Heirs Council because he has a friendly personality, and because he is seen as smart. But mostly because he has been able to prevent division. But everyone knows that the peace may be about to end, with Jason being 45 and really too old to continue in the Council.

Angelle missed most of Jason's speech because, honestly, most of it was meaningless to her anyway. Many others probably tuned out of Jason's speech too, because it consisted of

meaningless praising of almost every empire in the world. Jason really is a smart man, and he knows that some fault lines are better left untouched. This is his key to maintaining the peace. Yet uncontroversial means boring most of the time. And in times like these, when the fault lines are getting angrier and angrier, and when Jason is seen by most as yesterday's man, to be gone in less than two years' time, what Jason had to say was ultimately seen as irrelevant. As Jason continued to speak, people were chatting amongst themselves, perhaps about the coming Great Cultural War that everyone is expecting now. Not that anyone had to pay attention anymore. Heirs Council used to invite speeches from around the world, and votes on various resolutions. But in the name of unity and peace, in recent years Jason has made sure that there are no votes to be taken. And without votes nobody bothers to give speeches.

"And may I announce, this will be an important year too. After 21 years as the Head of Council, I will be retiring at the next election. Yes, you will have a new Head of Council," Jason said.

The house fell silent. There were some audible gasps. For while this was all just expected, the early announcement meant that the Great Cultural War had begun. Those who stood for tradition versus those who stood for innovation. Those who stood for age-old boundaries versus those who stood for a new level of inclusion. The fault-lines had been getting bigger and bigger since the 1980s or so, and the world was already at breaking point. Both sides knew that securing the next generation would mean conclusively winning, once and for all. With the leadership of the Heirs Council up for grabs, the stakes couldn't be higher.

Angelle, being new to this 'game', has yet to fully understand these implications. However, her parents have taught her enough to let her understand the chances important elections can gift to otherwise new arrivals. This year, she is going to work very hard to build her team, and get them elected into this place. That way, she will no longer be alone in here, and she will have a solid start towards wherever she is destined to go.

Chapter 17

A Change of Mood

The year 2008 had barely begun, and now there's a mood of change everywhere. This was due to both local and global factors. Locally, the stakes inherent in this year's Heirs Council elections has energised all sides. Whilst King Jashor and his The Rules Guardians allies have doubled down on their efforts in the hope that they will finally control the Council as well as its new leadership after these elections, they seem to be going backwards rather than forwards, mainly because the opposition forces have begun to consolidate support in a substantial way. Suddenly it looked like The Rules Guardians may not be getting their way anymore, that the election would be much tighter than previously thought.

The local mood of change also seems to be supported by a more global version of this theme. Suddenly, the world wasn't as afraid of change as it was, just four years ago. Just at the end of last year there was a change of government in Australia resulting from an optimistic campaign for leadership change. This year, all eyes will be on the US, where President Bush's term must end, and the two parties will once again fight for the presidency. Whilst four years ago many observers openly doubted if the Democrats were relevant anymore, now they are more favoured to win than Bush's Republicans. What a change of fortune. Angelle wondered if the same could happen here. One presidential candidate in particular, a man by the name of Barack Obama, appeared to particularly embrace this mood of change, with considerable success. 'Hope' and 'Change' are what he is all about, it seems. Can Angelle and her team learn anything here?

Angelle is now more determined than ever to expand her team on Heirs Council, after one year of being the lonely MHC who had to leave her friends behind to attend the monthly meetings, and who made no friends at the Council because everyone else saw her as an opponent to be extinguished. She had been studying Obama's 'hope and change' campaign, as well as last year's Kevin07 campaign from Australia, to see if she could learn anything. The more she looked into these campaigns, the more she was convinced that she was on the right path, with her new style of simple messages that give people hope. But one thing was missing, and that was money. Both campaigns did cost a huge amount of money to run, and it was simply beyond someone like Angelle to fundraise anywhere near that much, even adjusted for the much smaller scale of an Heirs Council campaign rather than for a national election.

"I have a big idea. I want to run something like Obama's Hope and Change campaign, for this year's election. There's a mood of change out there, here in Pacificland, as well as in the rest of the world, and we have to ride on this wave," Angelle said.

"So go for it! I know you can do it!" Katie said.

"But I do have one problem, and that's money. You see, even in this new world, money is required for everything. And we just don't have enough of it," Angelle said.

"How about the internet? That's been one of your strengths so far, and a viral video would be so 2008," Mandel said.

And that was how Angelle decided to embrace the internet video as the next 'secret weapon'

of her campaign. The success of 'viral videos', videos that spread like viruses on the internet, can be said to be one of the biggest cultural changes of the last few years. The rapid uptake of broadband internet in the earlier part of the decade had enabled videos to be broadcasted over the internet with acceptable quality, and several websites dedicated to hosting videos then started up to further enable people to create and share video content. As a result, while the ability to broadcast your message via video used to be restricted to very few people up until even just a few years ago, nowadays even individuals with not much help have been able to create videos that have been shared and viewed many thousands of times.

Angelle decided to make a video for each of her key messages, explaining what they are. Successful videos tend to be short, so she decided to set a time limit of three minutes for each video. She made a total of seven such

videos, and linked them up to the Team Princess Spirit website and social media profiles. Everything was pure trial and error at this point, since none of Team Princess Spirit had ever made an internet video before. Angelle hoped that it would work, but really couldn't be sure.

A week had passed, and only several dozen people had seen the videos. Which was far from success, from a 'viral video' perspective. Angelle did not like it, but it wasn't a surprise. It was trial and error after all, and now it is time for a second attempt.

"As my trusted adviser, what do you think I should try next?" Angelle asked Natalie.

"How about we look at what viral videos have in common?" Natalie suggested.

"How should we go about that?" Angelle asked.

"We should probably start by looking at some viral videos," Natalie said, showing Angelle a listing of the top 100 viral videos of 2007.

"We probably can't do cute kittens. It would distract from our campaign," Angelle said.

"I agree there," Natalie said.

"And we don't want to talk about any celebrities, local or foreign. It is unwise to associate ourselves with any of them, especially as you don't know what they would do later on," Angelle said.

"Good point," Natalie said.

"I'm also not up for dressing up in weird costumes, or lip syncing to music. That would

send the wrong message about me," Angelle said.

"I also agree with this," Natalie said.

"So what can we do, then," Angelle asked.

"Don't you see? It's all about doing something special, and something that people want to talk about with others. It doesn't have to involve kittens, celebrities or costumes. Those are just examples of this broader theme," Natalie said.

"Once again, you are the smart one," Angelle said. "But what special thing can we do, that hasn't been done before?"

"I think we need time to think. Give it a few days' thought and we may have an answer," Natalie said.

Campaign season is still quite a long way off, but invites for debates are already going round. This was the most important election season for Heirs Council in decades, after all. The trouble for Angelle is that Team Princess Spirit had received none. After that debate that never was with The Rules Guardians, none of the other teams want to debate Team Princess Spirit, as they cannot be sure whether there was something wrong with Angelle and her team that caused their opponents to withdraw so suddenly. Of course there wasn't, but it's something they won't just take Angelle's word for.

"We need to demand a re-debate with The Rules Guardians," Katie said.

"But how can we do that?" Daniel asked.

"It's not like they would entertain our request. It would just look dumb," Mandel said.

Angelle suddenly had an idea.

"We should use the force of popular demand to make them re-debate us. The people out there want to see such a debate, I think," Angelle said.

"How can we do that?" Katie asked.

"By our new secret weapon. The viral video," Angelle replied.

Chapter 18

The Re-Debate

"Supreme Court Invalidates King's Midterms", read the front page headlines. Apparently, King Jashor's 2006 legislation to create midterm elections for Heirs Council was invalid, according to the Supreme Court of Pacificland, as such a change would have required a referendum. King Jashor has already announced that he is not interested in running a referendum, and will abide by the court ruling. In turn, this means that all seats will be up for re-election in this year's election, including Angelle's.

The game is suddenly harder, and the stakes are suddenly higher for Angelle. Still, nobody ever promised that the work of a Princess would ever be easy, she told herself. Now is also not the

time to get negative. For as she had expected, the video-based campaign to get The Rules Guardians to offer a re-debate became sort of viral, and yesterday The Rules Guardians' president finally reluctantly agreed to a re-debate, to be held next week. Angelle didn't know what they were going to throw at her this time, but staying positive was the most important thing right now.

Better to focus on happier thoughts. Like the conversation she finally managed to have with her mother yesterday, a pre-debate conversation like the one they had four years ago. Last time Angelle pretended to just support things like gay rights for electoral advantage, but yesterday she made it clear that her heart was really in it. And to her surprise, her mother said that she now agreed with everything in Team Princess Spirit's platform. Angelle knew that her mother was not one to change her

mind easily, and therefore the campaign was at least sort of working.

The hall was filled with people as Angelle and her team entered. The sight of Purple and Yellow on one side and White and Dark Blue on the other was sort of familiar. It looked just like how it was four years ago. No, it actually didn't, because both sides were full of people, unlike last time. This was a good sign, Angelle thought. Still, she couldn't rule out The Rules Guardians playing other tricks this time.

Angelle took her seat on the stage. She noticed that Jenelle was her opposite, the leading representative of The Rules Guardians in this debate. She also noticed that Jenelle seemed to

have a particular kind of smile on her face that spelled trouble.

Angelle waited. And waited. Like an eternity. She began to wonder if something was wrong again.

Finally, someone else walked onto the stage. It was a tall, thin young man, with short black hair, someone Angelle seemed to have seen before. Somewhere. He walked to the microphone.

"Good evening ladies and gentlemen. My name is Robert, and I am the moderator of this debate. I will be asking the questions, and the candidates on both sides will be giving you their answers," he said.

Angelle suddenly realised that Robert was, in fact, Jenelle's boyfriend. This wasn't going to be a fair trial.

"We're already running late, so let's begin. Question one. Just a few days ago, voters in the US state of California voted against gay marriage, in a referendum. In fact, every time there has been a referendum on the issue, anywhere in the world, gay marriage has lost. From reading the platforms of the two teams here tonight, we know that the issue of gay marriage is one where they do not agree. Given the overwhelming consensus out there against gay marriage, why should there be a disagreement on this issue between the candidates at all? The coin flip done before this debate began determined that The Rules Guardians will speak first," Robert said.

What a loaded question, Angelle thought.

Jenelle started speaking.

"Mr moderator, what you have said is very true, and it just points out how the values of our team are the values of the majority,...

Angelle really couldn't stand the self-righteousness in this inherently disrespectful and divisive speech. She knew what Jenelle was going to say anyway, so she decided to just shut it out.

"Now, let us hear from Team Princess Spirit," Robert said.

"Mr moderator, may I firstly say that I cannot agree with the word you used, the

'overwhelming consensus' against marriage equality for same-sex couples. In the recent Californian vote, the margin was just 52-48, after all. Hardly an overwhelming consensus. Besides, new ideas take time to be digested by society, and people can change their minds gradually. The vote may flip the other way, if taken a few years later.

"But what's most important is the question of what kind of society we want to be. Do we want to be a society that treats people differently based on their status as a minority? Do we, as a society, allow a so-called tyranny of the majority? A real Princess would never allow that. A real Princess would side with the oppressed, no matter how few they are, and how many the oppressors are. As such, my team, Team Princess Spirit, must stand up for the equal dignity and rights of same-sex couples, whether the majority out there agree with it or not," Angelle said.

Jenelle suddenly leapt to her feet.

"Did you just call us tyrants and oppressors? That's disrespectful of you," Jenelle said. "Mr moderator, I demand that she be censured for this!"

"I'm afraid I'm not in a position to judge whether a response is disrespectful or not," Robert said.

"Well, then, this will be an unfair debate. And we cannot partake in unfair debates. Therefore, we should go," Jenelle said, and then led her team off the stage.

"Don't worry, you did nothing wrong," Natalie said.

"I know. But most people are too busy to look at the details, and perception is everything. Given

the media, both at this school and in the outside world, are often supportive of The Rules Guardians, I have a bad feeling of how everything will be reported," Angelle said.

"You do have a point. But don't forget that we now have citizen journalists and bloggers, many of whom will analyse what really happened and tell people the real story. Never underestimate the power of citizen journalism," Natalie said.

Angelle saw just a glimmer of hope.

Chapter 19

Team Angelle Can Do It

"Let's go home and watch the results, whatever they may be," Angelle said to her team as the polls closed, after a long day running between more than a dozen important polling stations.

"No, let's go to the Convention Center," Natalie said.

"Why?" Angelle asked.

"Well, your results party is there, of course," Natalie said.

"I'm actually not in the mood for jokes, sorry," Angelle said.

"We're not joking. Your parents paid for half of it, and we paid the rest, together. It's going to be one of the greatest nights of your life, of our lives, after all," Katie said.

It turns out that Team Angelle, as well as Angelle's mom and dad, were so confident that this would be a great result, that they booked the great hall of the Convention Center to celebrate, even before election day actually happened. Their confidence was based on late opinion polling which showed a very positive reaction to Angelle's strong stance in support of marriage equality at the debate, as well as disgust over The Rules Guardians walking out on her again. Of course, Angelle wouldn't know yet, having decided to not look at the polls in the last few weeks.

Angelle sat in front of the big screen, nervous as the results came in. Not far away, her friends

were preparing for a great party, but she didn't know what they were doing, being so absorbed.

After what seemed like an eternity, the seat count for Team Princess Spirit finally ticked over to one. Angelle was relieved, at least she kept her own seat. But she didn't want to appear too happy, after all none of her team have won yet.

By ten o'clock in the evening, it was clear that The Rules Guardians had lost half of their seats, and will not get to decide the next leadership. There were celebrations across town. The Rules Guardians was crumbling just four years after its very successful debut. This was really change that was happening, and happening fast.

Of course, one of the biggest celebrations was here at the Convention Center. Team Princess Spirit had won six seats, something beyond Angelle's wildest dreams. Angelle will now be joined by Natalie, Mandel, Katie, Jordan and Daniel at the Council.

"We did it! We did it!" Natalie screamed.

"I am so proud of you," Angelle's mom said.

In the background, the election analyst was giving his views on the results.

"You know, it was that debate that changed everything. Before that evening, The Rules Guardians looked certain to win at least a majority, and hence control the next leadership. It all came undone for them when they walked out of that debate. Liberal or Communitarian, Conservative or Progressive, nobody likes people who don't play fair, nobody likes people

who pull stunts when serious debate is actually warranted. Their support went in all directions, mostly to more moderate conservatives.

"As for the other side of the debate, Team Princess Spirit, they got a late boost. Previous polling suggested they would win only one to two seats, but tonight they won six. Of course, part of it was that people do like someone with the guts to stand for their own beliefs. But the issue of gay marriage itself, whilst probably still controversial in the electorate as a whole, is becoming increasingly popular amongst young people. And things are changing. After all, Prop 8 in California only won by 52-48. We may indeed be on the verge of major change. Looking at the trend, I can almost predict that gay marriage will be a reality here in Pacificland as well as in many other countries in ten years' time, if not less. I know it's a bold prediction to make, but here's where I will put my money."

It was time for Angelle to give one final, short speech.

"I really have to thank all of you. You're all so great, I wouldn't be here without you.

Today has been beyond my wildest dreams. It's one of those moments where I am glad that I did not give up earlier.

That the debate went well for us, I would never have guessed. I actually expected the opposite, you know. But I just had to stand up for what I believe is right, and that's what we will continue to do."

It was now three in the morning, but Angelle was still so excited she couldn't sleep. So she took her diary out, and began to write.

"Dear diary,

Today is Victory Day for myself as well as for my team. I need to write this down so I can remember how I feel, during hard times that will inevitably come in the future.

It's still a long road ahead. I mean, my goal is still to become Cultural Royalty one day, and that will be a long road. Though six seats technically mean that I am more than halfway there. We have to keep those seats until I am over 25 and also win more, though.

But nowadays I am also interested in more than just becoming Cultural Royalty. I want to help change the Council, this country, and even the world. There's so much that needs to be changed, but a Princess never gives up, right?

But for now, I will celebrate, and take some time out from all this.

And here's a song to capture how I feel right now:

'Love is All Around Us

Forget that day I was so sad

Why did it have to be this way

I thought we'd all understand by now

What's good for us, what is not

Sometimes I felt so powerless

It seems as if we were in

The hands of a fate teasing us

And there's no way we can win

But today that seems so far

From where we are

From this splendid view

Love is all around us

And today it's all over

All the wind and the storms

We have sailed through all of that

And from here we can go anywhere

Often it was two steps forward
Then came the wind swept us miles back
Then we fought more, then further we slipped
Any moment it could all fail
It took five years of our life
In which we did achieve nothing
They said we were wasting our time
But we refused to listen

But today that seems so far
From where we are
From this splendid view
Love is all around us
And today it's all over
All the wind and the storms

We have sailed through all of that
And from here we can go anywhere'

Love,
Angelle,

4 December 2008."

Also from TaraElla...

Princess's Spirit Life Ideas #1:

The Dreamers' Guide to Life

This is a book by a dreamer, for dreamers, and all about the dreamers' perspective on life. Whilst everyone may take something away from it, it was written especially for dreamers who are struggling with their dreams, with society's negative attitude to dreams and dreamers, and with the multiple barriers we sometimes call 'realities'. The message is clear: you can and should keep being a dreamer, because not only do you not want to give up too soon, but being a dreamer also helps the world in an important way.

Also from TaraElla...

Princess's Spirit Life Ideas #2:

Yes, You Can Change The World Too!

You get to vote every three, four or five years, but the politicians never listen to us anyway, right? As a result of thinking like this, many people just observe the world go by. And as a result of that, some things never really change. In other words, we just give up.

The 21st century is like no other time in human history. Just the first less than two decades that we have seen so far, the 2000s and the 2010s, have seen a great expansion in the possibilities for everyone to contribute to the cultural pool, with major implications. We need to harness this power for good, we have a responsibility to do so.